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#86

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JOHN BYRNE: THREAT OR MENACE ?

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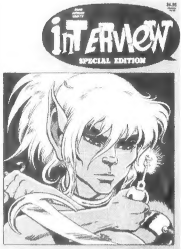

ELFQUEST. A pow-wow with the Pinis on Elfquest, the creation of an elfin world. John Costanza, letterer, tells all of being an artist. Stan Lee goes Hollywood, and the beginning of a legend now the Comico bunch, on their dreams and schemes for the future. Pini cover.

JLA-AVENGERS. George Perez and Roy Thomas tell all about a project that never saw print. Perez's never printed art, only available here! Also John Workman on Heavy Metal, Berke Breathed on Bloom County, Mike Friedrich on the biz end. Perez cover.

JUDGE DREDD VS BATMAN. Brian Bolland spills the beans on this project, first time round. Arn Saba saddles Neil the Horse. Don and Maggie Thompson give an inside view of the Comics Buyer's Guide. Bolland cover.

ROBOTECH. Carl Macek & Neil Vokes - from TV to comics - tell why Robotech's a hit. Phil Foglio - Hugo Award winning Sci Fi artist mumbles about Myth-Adventures, and Cat Yronwode on art for art sake and comics for comics sake. More. Vokes & Rankin cover.

TEENAGE NINJA MUTANT TURTLES. Kevin Eastman and Peter Laird give it up. How Turtles Mania began...(look where it went...) Stan Drake on the colorful career of his girls, Kelly Green and Blondie. Peter B. Gillis on censorship, comedy & death! Eastman & Laird cover.

DARK KNIGHT. Frank Miller expounds on his magnum opus. Fred Finger, on his father, Bill. Bob Kane, on the last 50 yrs since Bat birth. Jerry Robinson, on past memories. Burt Ward on the trouble with tights, and George Roussos on the early days. Miller cover.

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cover contributed by:
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UP FRONT

A particular form of anguish visits the discerning comics reader on occasion — the disquieting realization that you (and you alone) are picking up that great series. You have discovered the book, love it and want it to continue; but you know that unless other people pick up on it, enough to keep it viable in the ruthless comics market, that won't happen. It's an old story.

So, word of mouth being a tool at your disposal, you begin telling people all about that great series, hoping they will at least give it a look, praying they will see the light and start buying it. Perhaps you even take a copy around with you, risking its potential future value in order to impress people with it.

But then the rug whips out from under you, when it turns out that your dealer only stocks that one copy for you. It's a dilemma for Solomon: Do you risk someone else picking up that one copy you want, or do you shut your mouth and let things stand as they are? (Now, dealers say this isn't how it works, that people who are interested in something will tell them and they will stock accordingly and everyone will be happy — but just try convincing someone to buy something when there isn't one there to be bought.)

Or you might do what I recently did, make that dealer an offer he can't refuse. "Mr. Deale Man," said I, "I'll make you a deal: If you stock up on that HEP-CATS thing, I will buy any you can't sell." How can he lose? And if you're stuck having to buy extra copies, you can give them to people who then will be more likely to buy the book in the future. It's just crazy enough to work!

And, hey, you can try it out — starting with COMICS INTERVIEW, for example . . .

Darrel L. Boatz
Associate Editor

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— Don Thompson
COMICS BUYER'S GUIDE

FRAZETTA. Frank Frazetta. This artist of great renown shares his thoughts on many media from comics to fine art. Frazetta cover.

SEX & VIOLENCE IN COMICS: WHO'S TO BLAME
DAVID ANTHONY KRAFT'S
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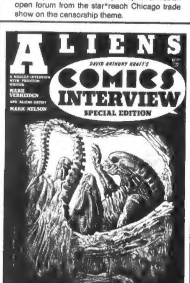
SEX & VIOLENCE IN COMICS. Frank Miller, John Byrne, Jerry Perles together with Ron Turner all expound on the limits and far-reaching effects of laws and perceptions. Plus an open forum from the starfreach Chicago trade show on the censorship theme.

WATCHMEN. Alan Moore reveals what he thinks of super-heroes, and talks about his controversial creation. Daniel Greenberg and Ray Winninger on the WATCHMEN game modules. Hank Rose on the secrets of a marketeer. Dave Gibbons cover.

LONE WOLF. Frank Miller speaks his mind. Kazuo Koike and Goseki Kojima, creators of a Japanese legend, in a talk from Tokyo. Plus First Comics crew Rick Obadiah, Kurt Goldzung, Alex Wald, Paul Guinan, Willie Schubert and Rick Oliver. Kojima cover.



ALIENS. Mark Nelson and Mark Verheiden point out the positive and negative problems of dealing with Aliens. Mike Richardson and Randy Stradley on directing a Dark Horse, and managing freelance talent. Nelson cover.

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"There seems to be a degree of hostility toward my work."

JOHN BYRNE

Byrne-bashing." To the uninitiated, it sounds, perhaps, like something John Cleese might describe as occurring in the Cotswolds of England in a Monty Python routine. But, in the past year, it's become a frequent topic in the letters columns of the comics press. For some reasons, John Byrne and his work seem to generate both passionate interest (as noted by the sales figures on his work) and passionate detractors. The most recent outbreak of anti-Byrne sentiment came when he announced his departure

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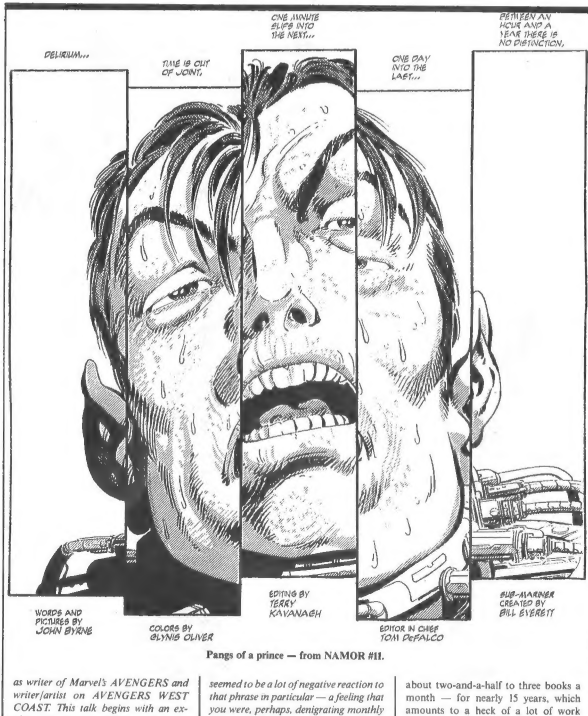
"I'm doing NAMOR, writing IRON MAN — but the


DELIRIUM...
TIME IS OUT OF JOINT.
ONE MINUTE SLIPS INTO THE NEXT...
ONE DAY INTO THE LAST...
BETWEEN AN HOUR AND A YEAR THERE IS NO DISTINCTION.
WORDS AND PICTURES BY JOHN BYRNE
COLORS BY GLYNIS OLIVER
EDITING BY TERRY KAVANAGH
EDITOR IN CHIEF TOM DEFALCO
SUB-MARINER CREATED BY BILL EVERETT

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Pangs of a prince — from NAMOR #11.

as writer of Marvel's AVENGERS and writer/artist on AVENGERS WEST COAST. This talk begins with an explanation of some of his words in the statement released at that time . . .

PATRICK DANIEL O'NEILL: *When you announced that you were departing the two AVENGERS titles, you said it was time to "get out of the trenches." Reading over the responses to that, there seemed to be a lot of negative reaction to that phrase in particular — a feeling that you were, perhaps, denigrating monthly comics and the people who do them. What did you mean by "getting out of the trenches" and did you mean any denigration?*

JOHN BYRNE: Let me answer your questions in reverse order:

No, I meant no denigration. I meant simply that I had been producing comics on a monthly schedule — averaging about two-and-a-half to three books a month — for nearly 15 years, which amounts to a heck of a lot of work without any break. With the current editorial and political temper at Marvel and DC, I came to the conclusion that the only way I could do the kind of comics I wanted to do was if I did special projects and my own projects — self-publishing or something along those lines.

When I say "getting out of the

kind of thing I like to do is increasingly impossible."

trenches," a lot of people interpret it as my turning my back on comics, which is certainly not what I said or what I meant. I'm still going to be doing monthly books — writing and drawing NAMOR, writing IRON MAN — but I've realized that to do the kind of thing I like to do, the kind of thing I've been doing for the last 15 years, is becoming increasingly impossible with the way comics works nowadays.

PAT: *How is the way comics works nowadays different from 10 or 15 years ago when you were at the height of doing the X-MEN?*

JOHN: For one thing, there's been a distinct change in attitude among the people who are doing comics. The preservers are less in evidence and the destroyers are more in evidence.

People no longer take on a project thinking to themselves, "This is great; I'm inheriting the mantle of this great thing that's been around forever." They seem to take on the project thinking, "How much of this can I prove wrong? How much of this can I say was a lie?" To my way of thinking, it has become impossible for anybody to make any kind of a lasting contribution to comics as they are structured today. You know that, no matter what you do — especially in my case, where there seems to be a degree of hostility toward my work — the next guy is not going to think, "How much of this can I preserve?" but "Here's my chance to show how much **Byrne** (or whoever) was wrong. Here's my chance to put the lie to all this."

That seems to be the only way they do comics at DC these days — everything was a lie.

It's very disheartening. You sit down to try and do a good day's work, but in the back of your mind there's a little demon, saying, "It doesn't really matter, 'cause the next guy who does this book is going to change it."

My whole approach, even with something like MAN OF STEEL, has always been "How much can I keep?" as opposed to "How much can I throw away?"

PAT: *Is there a difference in the way editors work with creative teams?*

JOHN: Some of the time. It seems to have gone back to the frame of mind that sees the editor as the creative person and the writer and artist as little robots who work for him, which doesn't do it for me. That was a frame of mind that had pretty much died out by the time I got into the business — but which seems to be making a comeback in many cases.

Here and throughout this interview, character designs from the fertile mind of John Byrne.

The best editor for me is, by definition, someone who hires the people he thinks can do the best job, then stands back and lets them do it. Many of the editors I have worked with in the past several years seem to take the attitude of having to control me or having to direct me, as if I haven't been doing this for 15 years, and don't know what sells by now, and don't have a following that expects "**John Byrne,**" as opposed to **John Byrne** as diluted through some editor who may or may not have been in the business a fraction as long as I have.

That sounds a bit pompous — but there you go.

PAT: *Is part of the problem that there's too much editorial turnover at the Big Two, not enough editors who've been in the business long enough to have the same kind of feel or finger on the pulse of the market as you do?*

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"We're not little writer and artist robots anymore."

THEY MOCK ME, MOTHER, THEY MOCK THE COLOR OF MY SKIN...
THERE, THERE, MY SON. BE BRAVE. THEY ONLY MOCK WHAT THEY FEAR.
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Namor, a la Byrne — from issue #11.

JOHN: That's possible. I hadn't really thought of it in terms of turnover, but certainly the editors who have been around longer seem to be the ones who understand that an editor's job is as much to leave it alone as to mess with it. So it could be too many new people coming in, people who don't understand the way comic books work today. It's been 30 years since the days when the editor called in the writer and said, "Here's a story idea — develop it." It hasn't worked that way since Stan and Jack and Steve were re-inventing comics in the '60s, with the beginning of the "Marvel Age."

PAT: *Let me play devil's advocate. Many of the writers I've interviewed — particularly those who started somewhat before you; the "second wave" of the late '60s, especially the ones who started at DC — have a great deal of affection for the working methods of Julie Schwartz. He didn't bring in the writer and say, "Here's a story idea," but did bring in the writer and say, "Throw me some story ideas," and then together they worked them out. Julie would then say, "Now, go develop it into a full script."*

Any problems with that: the editor as source of inspiration?

JOHN: No. No problem. I have no problem with the editor as collaborator, but what I do have a problem with is the editor who views himself as the creative force on the book — who tells the writer and artist what to do or tries to.

I agree with something **Frank Miller** said to me years ago: The editor can make as many comments, offer as much input as he likes, but ultimately it is the writer and artist's names on the book. It is their work that is being perceived by the fans and therefore their statement that must be made. If the editor wants it to be the editor's statement, he should write it himself. We're not little writer and artist robots anymore. Unfortunately, there are not enough editors these days who are prepared to view the situation this way; that they are not, after all, the creative force.

I see an editor — this will get me in trouble with every single one of my editors . . . as a sort of chauffeur. It's his job to make sure the book — the car — is running smoothly, that it's pointed in the right direction, to offer helpful hints and shortcuts. But, ultimately, it's the person sitting in the back seat who decides where we want to go and what route to take. That person in the back seat, in this case, is the writer and artist.

That's the situation that evolved at Marvel. **Stan Lee** was his own editor and the editors I worked with at Marvel in the beginning — the pre-**Shooter** days —took a very laid-back attitude and knew that it was every bit as much an editor's job to leave it alone as to mess with it. It was my job to do the best I could and not turn in whatever I felt like and let the editor fix it.

PAT: *Continuing as devil's advocate: Shouldn't an editor start, at least, with his or her own vision of what the book should be — and then hire the people who will best turn that out? And if he or she feels the creative team is no longer doing that, have the right to say, "Get back on the vision I see or I'll get somebody else"?*

JOHN: That depends on the conditions under which you came onto the project. When I was doing the FANTASTIC FOUR, as a good example, it was "editor of the month." I was on the book for about six years and in that time I had six editors, so I was firmly convinced that it was not the editor's vision, it was my vision. Any time an editor said, "I think this is the way the book should be done," if I didn't agree, I'd have to say, "No, I've been doing this book for six years; this is my vision." That's very much the way the industry had developed up to that point. The **X-MEN** is not the vision of the editor, it's the vision of **Chris Claremont**. There's another book that's had half-a-dozen editors and one writer.

As an example in opposition: **Howard Mackie** called me up and asked if I would like to write IRON MAN. I said sure. Howard then told me what he wanted. That was absolutely fine: It was already Howard's book, he'd been with the book for several years. That's a situation where the editor is hiring me because he wants what I do, but he wants me to do it in the way he wants it.

The flip side would be something like SHE-HULK, where I was asked to develop the project, to figure out what to do with the character and then pick an editor. It was always in my mind that it started with me and therefore it was my project and not the editor's. The editor felt the other way and suddenly I found myself being told what to do on a book that hadn't existed until I "created" it.

It depends on where you start. I'm perfectly willing to be a good little art robot, if I am hired to do an existing book, or if I come on to something where

"This will get me in trouble with every one of my editors."

THEY FEAR ME? WHY?
BECAUSE THEY SENSE YOUR POWER, YOU ARE SOMETHING NEW IN THE WORLD, NAMOR,
...NAMOR...
THE FIRST MINGLING OF THE BLOOD OF THE MEN OF THE SURFACE WORLD WITH THAT OF OUR PURE ATLANTEAN STRAIN...

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the editor has a longer tenure than I. But if you get into something where I have essentially created the title, such as ALPHA FLIGHT — **Denny O'Neil,** while he was editor of ALPHA FLIGHT, never once questioned anything I did with those characters, never once came along and said, "This is not my vision," because he understood they were my characters. I had created them, I knew who they were. He would occasionally say, "Are you telling this story as clearly as you can?" which is certainly acceptable, but he never once quibbled with my interpretation of the characters.

Now, if I were to go and do BATMAN with Denny at DC, I would of course have to completely surrender to his vision and not start saying, "Here's how I think Batman should be played." If I think Batman should be played any differently, then I would wait until an editor came along who was doing it the way I felt it should be done . . . which is not to say I think Batman should be done any differently.

When **Howard Mackie** asked me to do WEST COAST AVENGERS, a book that was already in existence, that was already his, he asked me to run away with it, to do it my way. He felt that was what the book needed.

So there are basically three ways of coming to a book: The editor says, "It's mine — here's what we're going to do"; the editor says, "It's yours — we'll do it your way"; or the editor says, "It's mine — but I want to do it your way."

PAT: *A good example might be when*

THAT MAKES YOU SPECIAL, UNIQUE, AND IT IS THAT VERY UNIQUENESS WHICH THEY FEAR...
THEN... LET THEM! LET THEM FEAR ME! LET ALL MEN FEAR ME!
FOR I AM NAMOR! I AM THE AVENGING SON!

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"I worry about the destructive attitude at DC these days."

Walt Simonson was given THOR and given carte blanche: the book was in such doldrums that anything he did couldn't be any worse.

JOHN: That's essentially what happened when I took on the FANTASTIC FOUR. I came in five issues before the 20th anniversary, but **Shooter** told me to do anything I could to restore its glory. I forget who was the editor right up front — it might have been **Jim Salicrup** — he just sort of stood back and said, "Do it," because they trusted me.

That's what it comes down to. After 15 years in the business, one expects a degree of trust that I'm not going to wreck the characters.

PAT: *Simonson's THOR was the first time anyone was — in my memory — given that kind of authority to really change a character. You had a carte blanche going on the FF, but you didn't really change them, you sort of consolidated them into the unit they had been.*

JOHN: I saw my job there as one of restoration as opposed to reconstruction.

PAT: *On the other hand, while maintaining most of what Thor was, Walt altered the surroundings of the character. In my mind, that was the beginning of the runaway, destructive force that you talked about at the beginning.*

Asking you to perform a little mass psychology on your colleagues, what do you think is in the minds of those people who decide "This character, when I take him over, will be completely different from what he was; I'm not only going to rewrite the world he exists in now, but rewrite the world he existed in for the past 20 years!" What's running in their heads?

JOHN: There's a phrase I've heard repeatedly in the last couple of years — depending on who is saying it varying degrees of shivers go up and down my spine — "It doesn't really matter, we can always fix it."

I've heard that enough times that I'm tired of it. That is part of this destructive attitude: "What the hell — it's only comic books; we can do anything."

My response is: We can do anything up to a point. If you start taking that as your jumping-off point — we can trash it because it doesn't matter — then, eventually, the people who are reading it will start to think it doesn't matter and we'll lose them. That scares me. It's why I worry about the destructive attitude at DC these days, where everything that comes out is from the "everything you

Bilbo Baggins of HOBBIT fame, as computer-generated by Byrne.

©1990 John Byrne

"Some Superman stories I did can not have happened."

knew was a lie" school. I wonder how many times you can do that before the fans say, "If everything is a lie, then this version will be a lie according to the next guy. Why am I bothering to read this?" There's nothing to depend upon.

PAT: *But I've been told, by those who have the figures, that — even given the older audience, even given the more continuous audience for comics today — the vast majority of the readership of any given book, as high as 75 percent, turns over completley within five to ten years.*

Choosing an example — putting it in my mouth, not yours — the people who are reading HAWKWORLD today have no direct memory of the Gardner Fox/Joe Kubert HAWKMAN of the early to mid '60s.

JOHN: That's a fascinating example, because — and this is part of the problem — the changes they've made in Hawkman do not simply put the lie to the **Fox/Kubert** stuff, it puts the lie to things I did, that happened less than five years ago.

There are now Superman stories that I did that cannot have happened, because they've done this thing with Hawkman. That's what's destructive — that it's changing things that are so recent. Here's a story we did only five years ago, and already it's a lie.*(*If you keep doing that, DC's going to be at a point where they'll have to do CRISIS every five minutes. *(Laughter.)*

PAT: *As long as you brought it up — changes on things you did relatively recently — what is your reaction to the latest of the LEGION OF SUPER-HEROES? You went to a lot of trouble to work out a somewhat convoluted explanation of how the Legion could still have been inspired by Superboy — and that led into an entire storyline that you initiated on Superman's reaction to having killed people in that pocket universe.*

JOHN: Now, of course, none of that ever happened.

PAT: *Unless they're going to play games again . . .*

JOHN: I believe they are.

That whole Superboy thing was annoying. When I first took on SUPERMAN, we had an editorial meeting with **Jenette Kahn, Andy Helfer, Dick Giordano** and **Paul Levitz**. Twice during the meeting, I turned to Paul and said, "You really do understand what we're doing

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Above: The Wasp. Below: Another Byrne creation.

©1990 John Byrne

"A lot of people at conventions have addressed things

here? Of all the books in the DC universe, yours is the one that's going to take the biggest hit. If there's no Superboy, then all of this Legion stuff goes away."

He said, "No problem, I've got it all figured out." So we went ahead with the project and six months in, I got this panicked call from **Helfer** saying, "We have to do a story that explains what happened to Superboy!"

"Why?" I asked. "I thought we had it all figured out — it was all based on legends, etc."

"No," he said, "We have to do a story that says all these stories really happened."

So we ended up doing it and now, three years later, that's being undone and redone

There have been several instances — all coming out of the same editorial office, it seems; an editor who's no longer with DC — that have given us a version of the Legion that screws up what we did with Superman; a Deadman Christmas story with the ghost of Supergirl in it.

That was one of the things that accounted for my hitting what **Jonathan Peterson** has dubbed "**Byrne** wall." Somehow, people had got it into their heads that, because we had made changes in Superman, it was now OK for everyboy to make changes in Superman — and not necessarily tell us what they were doing. We ran into all kinds of problems. Which is one of the reasons I left; I got tired of playing that silly game

PAT: *Earlier, you said there was a certain amount of hostility to your work. We've all seen it — in the fan community and the professional community. Can you*

©1[illegible] John Byrne

I'm doing as if I'm doing them without any control."

think of any particular reason for it? Some of it is not just directed at your work but at you, personally.

JOHN: Yeah, and I'm such a sweet guy.

I've long thought that some of the hostility to my work is based on a sort of residual memory of the days of writer/editors. A lot of people, at conventions, have addressed things I'm doing as if I'm doing them without any control. SUPERMAN is the prime example: I walked in off the street one day and said, "Stand back, I'm taking over SUPERMAN," and there was no one there to

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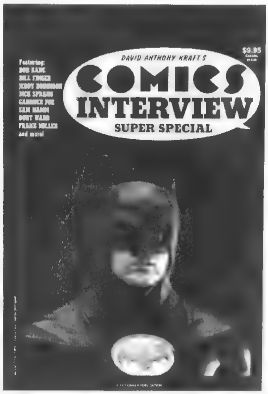

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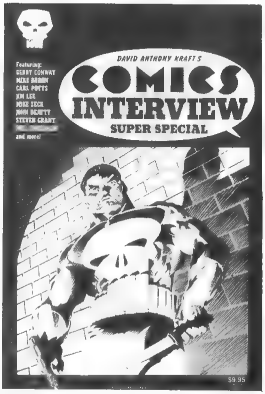

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"I go to conventions, I'm polite as I can be, I do sketches."

stop me. For some reason, people seem to think that's the way my stuff comes out — I just do whatever I want to do and nobody says, "No, John, you can't do that."

But those people are there. Nothing I have ever done has been done without some kind of editorial overseeing. On the FANTASTIC FOUR, I got a lot of flak from people who thought I was running rampant and destroying things without control — but everything I did was approved by **Shooter.** When I got onto SUPERMAN, the same thing happened; people said, "Look at this. **Byrne's** doing whatever he wants to do." Which was true — but everything I did was approved before I did it. Because of this dim memory of the days of writer editors, people seem to think I'm doing it without anyone watching what I'm doing.

A lot of it seems to be based, as well, on hearsay and bits and pieces. Long before anything I actually did on SUPERMAN appeared, people had already decided what I was doing and how I was doing it. I was reading these treatises in the fan press, giving exact details of what I was doing — that had absolutely nothing to do with what I was doing. "He's destroying everything" was the usual cry. Then the book came out and nobody backed off.

That seems to be the reason for the hostility to my work — people think I'm working without any checks and balances. The personal hostility, I don't understand, myself. Maybe I'm naive but, to the best of my knowledge, I've never done anything to particularly hurt anybody. I've been on the receiving end of far more attacks than I have ever initiated; I can't, offhand, remember ever initiating any attacks. Perhaps some of my fellow professionals view me as working without control as well, but I have no idea why anyone should be so hostile toward me on a personal level.

Perhaps you can suggest something?

PAT: *I think, maybe, it is an attitude toward your professional work that is slopping over into a perceived image of you, personally. I don't know you well enough to say anything more.*

JOHN: Somewhere along the line I inherited a reputation as one of the world's great assholes, and I'm not sure why. I go to conventions, I'm polite as I can be, I do sketches, I sit and talk to people all day long. It used to drive me crazy that I would go to Mid-Ohio Con every year, sit at the table for 12 hours every day for two days. Nine times out of ten, the other pros would come in, sit for a couple of hours, go off, disappear, come back for a while, then disappear again.

A few weeks later, in COMICS BUYER'S GUIDE, I'd read what a prince so-and-so was and what a complete jerk **John Byrne** is. And I'd think, "What did I do?" I sat and did sketches and signed autographs and answered questions, all day long. I finally came to the conclusion that the people who weren't there were the ones most fondly remembered, so I said, "OK, I won't be there anymore," and stopped doing conventions.

PAT: *I take it you don't think much of the concept of the writer/editor?*

John's first Silver Banshee drawing.

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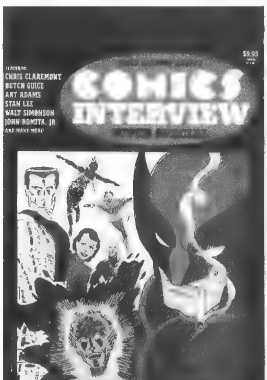

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"My wife functions as a pretty good editor for me."

JOHN: No, no, no. I think it's a license to steal. Everybody needs editorial guidance of one degree or another. Nobody should be absolutely free to do whatever they want. I just point to the history of writer/editor books; with the exception of the stuff done by **Stan Lee,** I can't think of anything that has impressed me that has come out of a writer/editor. In my own personal, constitutionally-protected opinion, they always tend to be self-indulgent, and go off in directions that only interest the writer/editor.

The last great writer/editor was Stan. He's a consummate professional and doesn't do stuff that is self-indulgent.

There's an inbreeding that seems to occur automatically in writer/editor books. The closest I ever came to writer/editor status myself was on an issue of the FANTASTIC FOUR **Jim Sallcrup** was the editor and I called him and said, "I'm going to do an Inhumans story and I have no idea what it is." He said OK. When I look back on it that's the worst issue in my six-year run on FF —the one issue with the least editorial input. I didn't talk it over with Jim at all; I didn't talk it over with anybody.

Editorial input can come from other than the editor. I'm always talking with **Jerry Ordway, Roger Stern,** or **Terry Austin,** telling them what I'm doing these days, getting feedback that way. Of course, if they question what I'm doing, it's still my judgment to continue or not. But I appreciate when people say, "Do you really want to do that?" And I do the same for them.

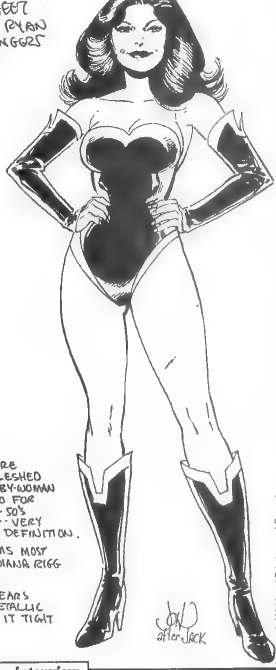
PAT: *Given your attitude toward the writer/editor and the self-indulgence that occurs from that, how do you avoid it in a self-published project?*

JOHN: I'll talk to my colleagues, as I have been. I always have my wife here who functions as a pretty good editor for me. She reads my stuff and tells me if she doesn't like anything. I listen to her more than I listen to anybody else, because she's a civilian. She'll tell me if it's not a good story — not whether I'm contradicting something in two panels from 25 years ago. If she says, "I don't get this," I realize I haven't clarified it enough. There are always checks and balances and I will always seek them.

PAT: *If the editor is essentially the publisher's representative — which is one way of looking at the job — if he has given you his editorial counsel and you ignore or refuse it, continuing to produce on your own best judgment — when you turn it in, doesn't he have the right to say, "I'm sorry, John, I won't publish this. You'll have to find another assignment."?*

JOHN: Yeah. If we're talking about a book where the editor has hired me to do a particular project, like IRON MAN — if Howard and I found ourselves in major contention over the direction of the book, it would ultimately be his decision. It was his book before it was my book. On the FANTASTIC FOUR, it occasionally went the other way. The editor would say, "Why are we doing this?" And I'd answer, "Because that's the way I want to do it — it's been my book longer than it's been yours." You can get almost childish about it — "It's my ball, we'll play with it my way."

PAT: *On the other hand, if you said, "It's my ball, we'll play with it my way," and the editor countered with, "It's the company's ball," aren't you out of luck?*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JOHN after JACK

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"I don't want to insult every editor I've worked with, but—"

JOHN: Yes — ultimately, it can come to that. That's what happened on SHE-HULK. I had major disagreements with the editor and **Tom DeFalco** claimed a position of "the editor is always right" and suddenly this character that I had striven to turn into a reasonably popular character was gone — because Tom decided that the editor's role was more important than mine.

PAT: *That's an interesting change. I remember discussing the difference in editorial philosophy at DC and Marvel about ten years ago. I thought that, at DC, in a dispute between an editor and his creative team, it would be the creative team that would be changed and the editor would remain on the book; while at Marvel, it was the reverse — the creative team would stay and they would switch editors. That seems to have changed 180 degrees now.*

A revised costume for **Mary Marvel, by John.**

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JOHN: It's part of that move toward editors who see themselves as the creative force on the book. I don't want to insult every editor I've ever worked with, but — when the COMICS BUYER'S GUIDE runs their poll every year, with the category "Favorite Editor," I always wonder, "How many fans have any idea what an editor really does?" I've worked with editors who let me do whatever I wanted, with editors who I had to fight tooth-and-nail to get to do what I wanted, with editors where it's a give-and-take. Ultimately, the book that comes out on the other end is exactly the same. Whatever I have produced is recognizably a **John Byrne** product; the editor is hardly the one who was responsible for it.

There was one particular editor — who shall remain nameless — who I always had to spend 20 minutes arguing with whenever I presented an idea. His response would automatically be, "Let's not do that," no matter what I suggested. It was a joke at that company: a senior editor once said, "If we put out a book dedicated to this guy, he would quibble about how to spell his name on it!" *(Laughter.)* In a situation like that, the product finally comes out as what I wanted, but I had to fight the editor every step of the way. Is that a good editor? Was that getting the best out of me?

PAT: *Is it possible for an editor to take that tone — to make you fight for what you want — to make sure that it's the best you have?*

JOHN: Sure — but this was every single time! Then you start to say, "Who's the person doing this book?" Whose name is associated with the book is what it comes down to. I don't think anybody thinks of the X-MEN as a **Bob Harras** book. Whatever Bob's contribution is, no one thinks of it as his book. No one thinks of NAMOR as a **Terry Kavanaugh** book.

PAT: *On the other hand, during her stint as editor of STAR WARS, with the creative team constantly changing, I always thought of that as a* ***Louise Jones*** *book*

JOHN: There are instances where you can't nail a creative team and it will fall to the editor to create the temper, the feel, the tone of the book. But more often, it falls to the people whose names come first in the credits: the writer and the artist.

PAT: *An example of a strong editor, in my mind: The commanding presence on any book he edits seems to be Carl Potts, no matter how strong the creative team.*

JOHN: Yes, Carl is a strong editor — but

"I was fired from THE SHE-HULK."

for the five minutes Carl was editor of the FANTASTIC FOUR, his attitude was that I was there first and the book was being given direction by me. He didn't come on and say, "OK, here's how we're going to change it."

There was a recent instance of a fellow writer who ran into the complete opposite of that. He'd been on the book for some time when the editor changed. The new editor called him up and said, "I haven't read this book, but I'm going to now and then I'll call you and tell you how I want it changed." This writer was appalled; it was his book, he'd been setting the temper and the tone for it, and now this new editor was coming along and saying, "Now we're going to do it my way." You really can't comfortably work that way. I can't, anyway.

PAT: *I want to get into some specifics with you — if you're willing . . .*

JOHN: Sure, as long as we can avoid slandering anybody . . .

PAT: *Or libeling them . . .*

JOHN: Whichever it is when it's oral

PAT: *As you speak it's slander; if I put it in print, it's libel.*

There have been now — over the last five years — three instances when you have walked off a title (to use a perhaps-too-pejorative phrase) . . .

JOHN: Are you counting the AVENGERS as two separate titles?

PAT: *No, I'm counting SUPERMAN, SHE—HULK and the AVENGERS.*

JOHN: I was fired from SHE-HULK.

PAT: *You were fired after refusing to do what the editor wanted.*

JOHN: I was fired because the editor was doing what I had been assured she would not be able to do

PAT: *OK — let's take them in order. Neither DC nor you have ever gone into much detail about exactly what happened with SUPERMAN. Are you under some constraint not to — or was it a personal decision.*

JOHN: It was a personal decision. I didn't want to generate what had happened to me the last time I found myself leaving a DC project — THE UNTOLD LEGEND OF THE BATMAN There, DC had screwed up, so I wasn't able to do the book – and when I said, "I can't do this anymore," I suddenly saw all these comments in the fan press from various people at DC, bad-mouthing me: "He'd done a bad job, anyway, so we were really glad he didn't finish it."

I had images of the same thing happening on SUPERMAN and I didn't want to get into a whole thing of defending what I had done. I'd begun to

And an updated Captain Marvel, also by John, retaining the familiar facial features.

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"I'd begun to feel that I was spending all my time

feel that I was spending all my time on SUPERMAN defending what I was doing anyway. I thought, "If I'm going to leave the book, let's see if I can leave that behind." It was a conscious decision on my part not to say anything

PAT: *Is it far enough in the past now to talk about it?*

JOHN: Let me see if I can say something.

On SUPERMAN, I think I essentially forgot which company I was working for. DC has gone 180 degrees in the last few years — from the company that never listens to the fans to the company that always listens to the fans. Looking back on the project, it is my perception that the minute there was a negative fan reaction to my work, which had, as yet, not been seen — that's very important, people were reacting negatively without ever having seen what I'd done — DC got cold feet. They backed off the project. Most of the time I was on SUPERMAN, although everything I did was done with approval, I felt it was done with very little support.

That culminated with the article in TIME magazine that dredged up all the things that the bad pre-release reports said we would do — none of which we did and reported them as if we had done it. When I saw that, I realized, "If DC had been in my camp, none of this would have happened." When all the stupid "They're turning him into a yuppie" stuff started coming out, DC would have gotten on its white charger and made sure all that was corrected But they didn't. It was sort of doomed from the start . . . and that's why I ultimately left.

PAT: *We've talked a little about SHE-HULK and that you were fired. In the popular mind, that has come down as the argument over leg hair. Is that a fair description of what the argument started with, or settled on?*

JOHN: When my "dear friend" **Peter David** found it necessary to bring that up in the BUYER'S GUIDE, I responded with a letter that said, "SHE-HULK was about leg hair in the same way the HULK was about wearing three-piece suits."

When I first went back to Marvel, after leaving DC, **Mark Gruenwald** said, "Why don't you do a She-Hulk book? You do such a great She-Hulk." I developed the concept: Let's make it funny, let's break the fourth wall, let's let her know she's in a comic book. Then they said, "Pick an editor." Well, there were all the editors I would automatically pick and then there was **Bobbie Chase** — who I had worked with very briefly on the FF when she was **Mike Carlin's** assistant editor. She was already the editor of the HULK, so it seemed logical. I picked her. That meant she automatically inherited this graphic novel that was already in the works.

She gave me a copy of the plot for the graphic novel to read. I read it on the train coming from New York on a Friday night. I was absolutely appalled by the

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on SUPERMAN defending what I was doing."

handling of She-Hulk in it, I had, at that time, been away from Marvel for two years. When I got home, I called **Mark Gruenwald** at home and said, "Look, I've got this graphic novel plot that's been in the works for God knows how long, it predates me. If this is how you want to play She-Hulk, I don't want to do the book. This is not the character I want to do." I acknowledged that it's Marvel's character and if this is how you want to do it, get somebody else. I wasn't being a prima donna or making demands.

Mark said, "No, it would be silly to have this unpublished graphic novel dictate what we do with She-Hulk." He told me to make notes in the graphic novel plot and anything I wanted changed would be changed. That was his agreement as managing editor — or whatever his title is.

So, I went through it and there were all kinds of things I thought were dead wrong in the handling of She-Hulk. She was played as an idiot, basically. One of the scenes was this scene where she's shaving her legs. That scene bothered me simply because she's sitting in the bathtub, shaving her legs, and she's just wrecked about a hundred razor blades, trying to shave one leg. I read that and I said, "If this woman is even remotely intelligent, she's going to wreck one razor blade," then she will do what she does at the end of that scene — call Reed Richards and have him build her something to shave her legs without wrecking razor blades.

It didn't seem logical to me that the character I saw as being very intelligent — she's a hot-shot lawyer, after all — would actually sit there and ruin a hundred razor blades shaving one leg, before she'd think, "Gee, I should call Reed Richards." So, I said, "No, I don't want this scene."

Subsequently, **Bobbie Chase** decided to rewrite my stuff to bring it into line with that scene. The agreement I got from **Gruenwald** was thrown out the window. When I complained, **DeFalco** took the position that he always supports his editors — and Mark was nowhere to be seen. He didn't come in and say, "Well, I gave him this assurance; we should stick by it." Mark vanished into the woodwork.

I was canned off the book because Marvel, as represented by **Tom DeFalco, Mark Gruenwald** and **Bobbie Chase,** were not prepared to keep their word.

PAT: *Does this lead you to believe that, in the future, you or anyone else given that kind of assurance should ask for it in writing?*

JOHN: Sure. I'm doing a project right now with **Stan Lee** for which I have spent many weeks prying something in writing out of them. "I don't want to do this just on trust," I told them. I can't trust anybody at Marvel anymore, in my opinion.

That's one of the ways that DC is better than Marvel; everything is in writing at DC. You start with a contract for every project you do and nail everything down up front.

PAT: *Let's move on to the AVENGERS titles. I'll tell you that I know of a hearsay running around that part of what went on with the AVENGERS dealt with a particular scene in the last issue you completed (AVENGERS WEST COAST #56, page 6). I heard that that was, if not the overriding reason why you walked, at least the straw that broke the camel's back.*

JOHN: I suspect I know the scene you're referring to, because I've heard the same rumors. **Bob Greenberger** called me up one day and asked, "Is it true you quit because of this?"

I will say right now, absolutely, unequivocally, it had absolutely nothing to do with that scene. It had nothing to do with any scene. The reason I quit the AVENGERS was exactly as follows:

A year ago, I went into the city to have a conference with the various editors and writers at Marvel to come up with the crossover story for the 1989 annuals — it eventually became "Atlantis Attacks." We had a story conference — **Bob Harras, Ralph Macchio, Howard Mackie, David Michelinie, Tom DeFalco, Mark Gruenwald** and myself.

I offered a storyline I had already launched — a plot in which Immortus is using the Scarlet Witch's power to warp probabilities to create a situation in which Kang would win his first battle against the Avengers. He will use her power to actually change history, because he's realized that, in order to warp

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"I'm planning to stay with NAMOR as long as I can."

probability, she must be doing something retroactive. She's not doing it consciously, but she's doing something that affects a thing for as long as it's existed. Immortus will use that power to change history. I was going to do a couple of issues that took place in that universe where the history had been changed.

I said, "If you like, I can accelerate that storyline and we can use it for the storyline." We talked about it for awhile and **Michelinie** suggested he could do a story where Tony Stark isn't an alcoholic, because that's been changed, we could put the Baxter Building back, lots of things.

Ultimately, Tom said no, he didn't want to do that for the annuals — and I went back to doing it at my own speed, the pace I had planned it for originally.

Then we came to an issue of AVENGERS WEST COAST in which all the subplots I had been doing leading up to this story came together in one scene: Hank Pym says to the Scarlet Witch, "It looks like your power does something retroactively." Tom saw that issue and said, "You can't do that; that changes the Scarlet Witch's power."

Howard Mackie, the book's editor, said, "You've already approved this; you approved it a year ago." Tom said he didn't. I said, "Yes, you did." He insisted he hadn't. Everybody said, "Yes, you did," and Tom still said he didn't. I said, "OK — I quit. I can't continue on this if a story that was approved a year ago suddenly isn't approved. If I have a story ripped out from under me, what am I supposed to do for the next ten issues?"

I quit because I realized I was in an absolutely no-win situation. There was no way to do what I had been leading up to for a year, because the editor-in-chief had suddenly decided he didn't want me doing this story. He wasn't going to have anybody change his mind: The editor came out on my side, other people in the room came out on my side — "We were all there when John put this story up. Nobody protested, Tom didn't say anything."

That's what got me off that book. I realized, much as **Walt Simonson** came to realize, that no writer will ever be good enough for the AVENGERS as long as the current highest level of editorial people are in control at Marvel. I got squeezed off just as Walt got squeezed off before me.

PAF: *In your view, expanding on what you said upon your departure from the AVENGERS, what is the future of John Byrne in comics?*

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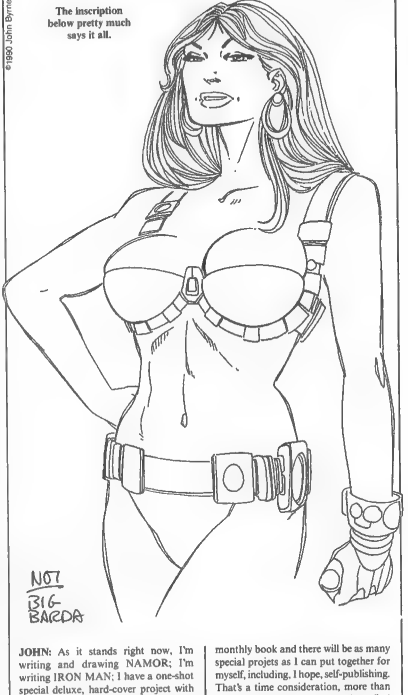


The inscription below pretty much says it all.

JOHN: As it stands right now, I'm writing and drawing NAMOR; I'm writing IRON MAN; I have a one-shot special deluxe, hard-cover project with Stan. Beyond that, I have several short-term, prestige-format projects lined up at DC. I'm planning to stay with NAMOR as long as I can; I no longer play 100 issues, because things are no longer mine to control — as I learned on both SHE-HULK and the AVENGERS, I can't judge how long I'll be on anything any more. NAMOR will be my basic monthly book and there will be as many special projets as I can put together for myself, including, I hope, self-publishing. That's a time consideration, more than anything else, because I tend to find myself getting committed to so many projects — I even have a commitment to Archie Comics — it gets hard to find the time to do my own stuff.

But I will definitely be putting together my own package, put it out on my own, control it *myself* — be a mad fiend. *(Laughter.)*

"The first three HEPCATS have come out

MARTIN

I happened to be at the local comics shop one day and ran across a lone copy of a new series I hadn't heard or read anything about. As I do pay some attention to such things, I just had to take a peek inside to see what I could find out. That was my introduction to Martin Wagner's HEPCATS, a truly amazing series. I was so impressed with the book that when I found out from the dealer that he would only be ordering enough of it to fill the demand of those who expressed an interest in advance, I made him a deal that if he stocked some extra copies for the sales racks, I would personally purchase any he couldn't sell. So far, neither he nor I have been stuck . . .

Martin Wagner and his bride, with friend.

DARREL L. BOATZ: *I noticed in YO that the name is actually Thomas Martin Wagner.*

MARTIN WAGNER: Yeah. It's **Thomas Martin Wagner IV,** so I use my middle name so we won't have any of this "Big Tom/ Little Tom" crap. *(Laughter.)*

DARREL: *And the series is HEPCATS, which you are self-publishing.*

MARTIN: Right. #1 came out late, but fans don't know that.

DARREL: *They know it now.*

MARTIN: Well, yeah, I made a big deal out of it because I was so pissed about it. But now with #2 and #3 having come out with some semblance of a schedule, it seems to be a feather in my cap. A lot of dealers and fans have gotten to where they're used to seeing independents coming out kind of around every time a two-headed calf is born, and the fact that the first three issues of HEPCATS *have* come out roughly two months apart each, a lot of people have said that's kind of impressive. People notice that.

That's one thing that I can guarantee to you people, all you folks at home reading this book, is that because it's my own project and I control all aspects of it and everything, this self-publishing thing, it gives me the luxury — that's how I say it — the *luxury* to do it right. And that includes getting them out on time and making each issue the best that I can make it.

DARREL: *How did you decide to go into self-publishing?*

MARTIN: Well, it wasn't a decision I came up with all at once. When I started publishing my daily strip, even after I had done SHASTA SAYS for a year and I started the HEPCATS strip . . . only when I started HEPCATS was I beginning to *seriously* consider cartooning as a career. I'd never considered it before. I was a radio and TV and film major and that's what I wanted to do, make movies and be a Hollywood hot shit — make really great movies and be a famous director. All film students have the stars

All artwork accompanying this interview © 1990 Martin Wagner.

two months apart — people notice that."

WAGNER

in their eyes.

I started publishing my comic strip at U. of H. *purely* out of boredom. I've always drawn, ever since I was a toddler — probably before that but I can't remember. I had applied for a transfer to U.T. in the fall of '86 but I had missed their deadline, so I had some more time to kill at U. of H. — by then I was thoroughly bored with that school. It's a commuter school. It's a major university, a state university, but it's a commuter school, like a community college. It's the sort of college that people go back to; the average student age when I was there was 27.

There really wasn't much going on *socially* - you live at home and go to college — so I started SHASTA SAYS out of boredom, and I continued it just as a lark. It was *fun* to do, and I guess I was fairly good at it because everyone liked the strip. Everyone would tell me, "You should get syndicated," or "There's no way to make a living drawing cartoons." *(Laughter.)* But when I had HEPCATS going at U.T. I decided, "Well, God, I've *done* this, I've made progress with it, and I've developed some skills here it looks like, I guess it makes sense to try to pursue it."

But I was also learning about — as you learn about when you try to get into *any* career — the odds, the chances of making it and everything. Of course, the chances of syndication are ludicrously *astronomical!* We have a guy down here who's famous locally, **Sam Hurt,** who has done a cult strip for *decades* called EYEBEAM. It started in the U.T. paper eleven years ago and he's been trying to farm it out *all* of that time. He self-

SHASTA SAYS by MARTIN WAGNER
OKAY, ONE MICHELOB. ARE YOU 21?
I'M 36.
THANK YOU! HAVE A NICE DAY.
YAAH!! NAILED YA!! NOT CHECKIN' I.D.'S, HUH? TAKE THAT, AND THAT!
OH, DAMN! YOU ARE 34
HEY, PAL. WE'RE SORRY SPEAK TO US?
CAN I GO TO BIOLOGY NOW?

The debut of SHASTA SAYS — Sept. 12, 1986 (Martin's first published strip).

VITAL STATISTICS

Name: Martin Wagner
Born: 27 April 1966 — Henderson, NV
Occupation: Cartoonist/Self Publisher
Education: 2.5 years University of Houston, 2.5 years University of Texas — no Bachelor's in nothing, but maybe someday
Credits: First regular published daily strip was a campus strip at University of Houston called SHASTA SAYS. Shasta being the name of the mascot, from '86 to '87, and then HEPCATS ran in THE DAILY TEXAN here at U.T. from '87 to '89; YO- THE FIRST HEPCATS BOOK was published in '88; and the HEPCATS comic book started in the summer of '89
Favorite Films: CITIZEN KANE; CASABLANCA, CHINATOWN; THE GODFATHER movies; BLADE RUNNER; 2001; LAWRENCE OF ARABIA; the orginal METROPOLIS; Fritz Lang's two Wagner movies; and, of course, any old Tex Avery and Bob Clampett cartoons
Favorite Cartoonists: Winsor McCay; George Herriman; Moebius, Dave Sim and Gerhard; Bill Sienkiewicz; Alex Raymond; Hal Foster, an excellent artist, more of an illustrator than a cartoonist; and other people who have pursued their own excellence
Pet Peeve: The fact that nobody's gotten sick of BATMAN yet and therefore my book isn't selling as well as it should be
Favorite Quote: The last thing Dave Sim said in the first letter he wrote to me - "Don't look down; don't look back."

"Starving kind of cramps my lifestyle."

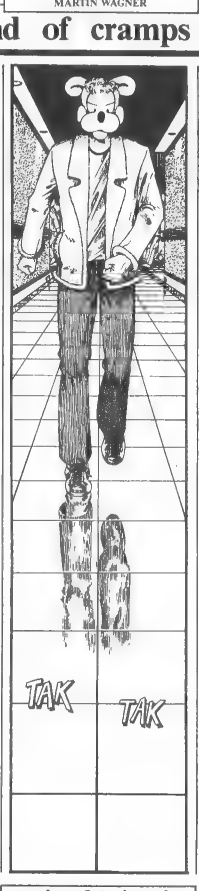
syndicated somewhat successfully, he was actually in about 20 papers, when United Features Syndicate finally hooked up with him and has agreed with him now to . . . actually, has gotten him to develop an *offshoot* of EYEBEAM. EYEBEAM is really cultish and they're trying to develop something a little more mainstream. That took him a *decade!*

I didn't want to do that. Starving kind of cramps my lifestyle. I have a lot of friends, buddies of mine, who have had to deal with the odds, and have worked for years and years. in situations they weren't terribly happy with. A good buddy of mine, **Doug Potter,** who does DENIZENS OF DEEP CITY for Kitchen Sink, he's 40 now and *finally* starting to do the cartooning and stuff that he *likes*. He worked almost 20 years without being terribly satisfied. I didn't want to spend half my life like that. I had had HELPCAT in the paper, actually, for a full year before I really started reading comic books again, paying attention to the business. At this time I was still trying to newspaper syndicate, I wasn't interested in comic books — I was still fairly uneducated about independents.

But I started reading some of the trade magazines and learned about this thing called "direct sales distribution," gradually catching on that people were publishing their own books and getting them out there. That sounded interesting. And, of course, at this time I had decided to do YO, the paperback, publish it myself on a *local* level — which is basically all I knew — so I was *already* planning to self-publish. I was pursuing self-publishing on a very small level. When I learned about the opportunities that existed for doing it on a large scale, actually doing a regular, professional comic book series of your own, that's when it really began to pick up my interest.

Then I learned about **Dave Sim,** what he'd accomplished, and what some other people had accomplished on a kind of smaller scale — what some people that I even knew and had met had done — and I decided, "Okay, this is *it!* This is the way to do it. This is an opportunity I'd be crazy not to grab." It's what I want to do, draw for a living. I never had any illusions that I would be a major phenomenal success story, but at least I would be making money drawing comics, drawing HEPCATS.

DARREL: *We should probably get into what HEPCATS is. What would you say to someone who is unfamiliar with HEPCATS just to briefly introduce them to the concept?*



MARTIN: My pitch! *(Laughter.)* It's a slice of life comic with furries. I was very careful to learn the terminology, there are funny animals and there are furries and there are anthropomorphics and blah blah blah. I think, actually, furries sums it up pretty well. I use the funny animal *characters*, but the stories — the whole point of the book — don't rely on the fact that the characters are funny animals.

DARREL: *It's almost an inverse of most fantasy-type things. In most fantasy the characters are real but the setting is fantasy; but in HEPCATS the characters are fantasy while the setting is real.*

MARTIN: Yeah, yeah. It's true stories with animals. If you like CEREBUS and OMAHA, pick up HEPCATS.

DARREL: *Where did you originally get the idea for the series?*

MARTIN: Well, I've actually been drawing anthropomorphic comics since I lived in Singapore, which was '73 to '76. When I was about nine or ten years old, myself and a bunch of friends of mine, we had a whole comics *line!* We drew comics . . . we had a whole *universe* of our own heroes and what have you. I mainly did this because when I was that young my parents weren't letting me read superhero comics because they thought they were nasty and violent and so on. So I just did my own! *(Laughter.)* Yeah, I had my nasty streak like most kids do.

I hated *cats* with a *passion* — I was deathly allergic to them. So myself and a friend of mine, Sam, created a comic book . . . I don't remember the title that we had originally for it, but it was basically a sort of science-fiction war type thing where there was one nation with anthropomorphic dogs and one nation with anthropomorphic cats. Of course, the cats were the bad guys. They were always played up as buffoons. They could never get anything right, they were being blown up by their own equipment and everything — this gave me a lot of prepubescent satisfaction. *(Laughter.)* That's where the very roots of my funny animal thing came along.

I enjoyed the series so much that when we moved back to the States I kept drawing it. I retitled it, called it MOONDOG, and it was a lot more sophisticated. I was paying more attention to media, cool TV shows and **Jack Kirby** comics and things like that, so I was advancing, trying to create this total view. And then, of course, I got into my teens and outgrew the whole thing, even quit reading comics But then in high school — I was a high school senior

"I didn't let any one story go on for too terribly long."

editing my paper — I started doing a campus strip called CHESTER to fill space. I drew it right on the pasteup sheets. I was a lot older, I had outgrown a lot of my childishness, so I was no longer an anti-cat person and all that. So I had these cat characters — our mascot in high school was a wildcat.

Then I got to college and I started, once again out of boredom, another campus oriented topical type strip called SHASTA SAYS, which had similar cat characters because the U. of H. mascot is a cougar. SHASTA SAYS was sort of in your DOONESBURY and BLOOM COUNTY mode of topical humor, and I did it for a year — in fact I did it even after I transferred to U.T. I transferred to U.T. in January of '87 and SHASTA SAYS had run for one semester and was *popular* enough that the newspaper staff there told me, "Keep sending it to us, we'll even pay you." *(Laughter.)* So I kept sending them SHASTA SAYS for a semester after I was at U.T.

At U.T., of course, I was seeing THE DAILY TEXAN, which compared with THE DAILY COUGAR is like night and day. THE DAILY TEXAN by college paper standards is an incredibly *professional* paper. And I decided that I *liked* these cat characters I had, and I had developed them well enough, and I wanted to broaden the scope, not make it so topical, make it more of a character strip. And instead of just doing cats I decided I wanted to introduce more animals, so I created HEPCATS. It's more what happens in your life, to you as a person, as opposed to what's going on on campus — a satire strip. I started with the cats, with Joey and his parents, and I eventually started creating the other animals.

Gunther was an afterthought. I was thinking Joey needed a roommate, and I remembered this rhinoceros that had made one appearance in a SHASTA SAYS strip — it was the only time in SHASTA SAYS that I utilized other species. And that was Gunther. I just created him in five minutes and threw him into the strip. So, what HEPCATS turned into was very much a true to life — as true to life as *I* could make it — strip with humorous overtones, just about what it was to be a college kid and a young person and all that.

DARREL: *It is pretty funny. I just loved when Joey's parents gave him the plastic.*

MARTIN: *(Laughter.)* Yeah. It was fairly easy to start off the strip with that story because I had just been off at school not very long and the first large bundle of cash that my folks had set aside for me — for all of my expenses, you know — I went through in *no* time. This money was supposed to last for two or three semesters, but you're young and so you piss away all of the money in a matter of months — that's what I had done. They never gave me any plastic, but it was very much a learning experience and it made a natural first story.

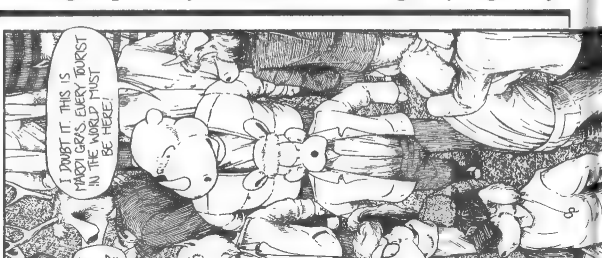
DARREL: *And Gunther really makes the strip work, I think. I read the strip in YO, and Gunther really seemed to be the character that carried it off*

MARTIN: Gunther is very much what you'd *like* to think of when you think of your best friend. I have never had a roommate or a buddy who has been quite like Gunther in every respect, but he is the sort of character that you could very well identify with someone who is a very dear close friend of yours. Of course, he's a foil to Joey. He's always pulling Joey out of scrapes and whatever. When the strip started out it wasn't quite like that, but it took not very long for Gunther to evolve. He's got a very low bullshit threshold, but I don't think he takes too many things too very seriously. And he's a little more grown up with Joey. I think any parent who had a somewhat immature kid off by himself would probably feel very good if that kid had a Gunther.

DARREL: *One thing also I noticed in the collection, YO, the strip . . . it tends to not take itself too seriously, and the story kind of jumps around a lot.*

MARTIN: Yes. A lot of that was sort of an anomaly of the publishing schedule. We had five strips a week and only so many weeks per semester, and I was doing long stories but I didn't want to let any one story go on for too terribly long because people would get really tired of it. So what I would *try* to do was work it out where if I had an ongoing story and it looked like it was going to carry for a little while, I would do it for two weeks and then I would cut to another story and do that for a week, and then get back and finish the long story. When you read it all in a book, you're able to sit and read fourteen months of strips in a day. It's a

"Nothing improves your art like drawing very regularly."



lot different than reading it over that fourteen-month period as it comes out. You really have to pull a rabbit out of your hat to keep people interested. I had to keep the story *flowing* so that over the weeks, day by day, people wouldn't get bored with any one thing.

DARREL: *So, let's get back to the comic book. When you decided to do the comic book series, what sort of alterations did you have to make to your concepts?*

MARTIN: Actually, surprisingly little. When I jumped into the comic book it really surprised a lot of people — a lot of people told me how surprising it was — how natural the transition seemed. I guess it was because throughout that time . . . as you're reading it you can pick out a lot of my frustrations with the limitations of the format. By daily strip standards HEPCATS is wildly over-drawn, there's enough plot for God knows how many strips, so there wasn't *that* much that I had to alter. It was more like an evolutionary process, dropping out your baby teeth and growing your permanent teeth.

DARREL: *One thing that stands out is that the art is a lot more carefully rendered in the comic book, at least compared with the strips in YO.*

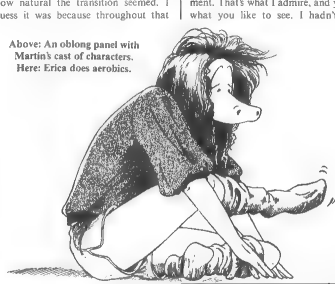
MARTIN: Yeah. That's just development. That's what I admire, and you do what you like to see. I hadn't been drawing very long *regularly* when I started the strip. I'd been drawing all my life, of course, but nothing improves your art like drawing very regularly and having to publish every day. It really helped improve my technique. You can tell from the strips, from the beginning of YO to the strip at the very end there's a very radical change. When I finally sat back after YO had been printed, was able to sit back and distance myself mentally from the book a little bit, it was kind of *alarming* how different the strip was from the beginning to fourteen months later. I had been honing my skills on a daily basis for three years by the time I started the comic book.

And I finally had gotten confident with a quill pen and using the ink and how to render so that you're paying attention to things like light sources and so on. Early on when I was still young and new at it and trying to make my rendering look really *complex* and interesting, I would over-render on occasion. It takes just practice to get that to the point where you're really doing something that can *be* as complex as you want it to be, or as *not* complex as you want it to be, while it's still all very clean and neat.

DARREL: *Now, the four main characters in the book are Joey, Gunther, Arnie and Erica*

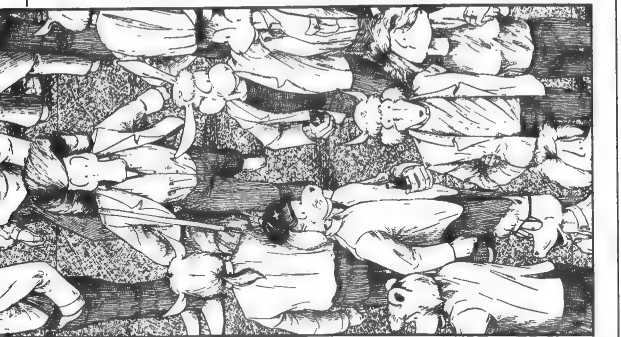
MARTIN: Yes.

DARREL: *Joey and Gunther are a cat and a rhino. What are Arnie and Erica?*



Above: An oblong panel with Martin's cast of characters. Here: Erica does aerobics.

"What's wrong with creating a funny animal species?"



MARTIN: *(Laughter.)* Well, I always thought Arnie was kind of a little bear person. **Sam Hurt** called him a muskrat. I have *no* idea what Erica is. This is funny, this is actually something that's interesting, because it's nothing that ever really occurred to me. When the **HEPCATS** comic book debuted I started hearing that all of these funny animal fans were really complaining and fussing because they couldn't tell what Arnie and Erica were. I thought that was really kinda funny. But I realize it is kind of *bizarre*, especially when you have this history of funny animal strips where it's fairly easy to identify them. Most of the funny animal tradition, of course, is that they rely on the animalism, so to speak, of the characters. Bugs Bunny and Daffy Duck and Mickey Mouse —

DARREL: *Woody Woodpecker and Yogi Bear.*

MARTIN: Yeah. But here I was just sort of winging it. I don't think it's such a big deal, but it seems to be a big deal to a lot of funny animal fans. What I try to tell them . . . it's a preconception that's hard to overcome. It doesn't *matter* what they are, just think of Arnie and Erica as Arnie and Erica. Look, cartooning is a creative field, and if I'm only really peripherally working in the funny animal genre anyway — because I don't follow formula, I don't think —

DARREL: *Except for their heads, the characters in HEPCATS aren't funny animals, they're people.*

MARTIN: Yeah. What's wrong with my creating my own funny animal species? It is a creative field and I'm very much a believer in anything goes. That's creativity! And if *that* doesn't satisfy people I can always say, "Look, what's Goofy?" *(Laughter.)* Is Goofy a dog? Pluto's a dog, but what kind of dog is Goofy? Do you know?

DARREL: *Haven't a clue.*

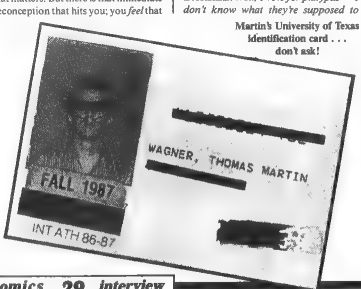
MARTIN: It doesn't really matter. A guy was telling me in San Diego, "But that's the whole *point* of funny animals, what kind of animals they are." I don't think it is. It's the characters, it's the story, that's what matters. But there is that immediate preconception that hits you; you *feel* that you should know *what* these characters are, you feel like it *matters* what sort of species they are. But if these were all human characters would you care if Erica was Hispanic? Would it matter to the story? Not particularly. But because it's funny animals, or because it *looks* like funny animals, people think that that should really matter.

DARREL: *Well, okay. I'll just say it anyway, though — I thought she was a duck originally, but —*

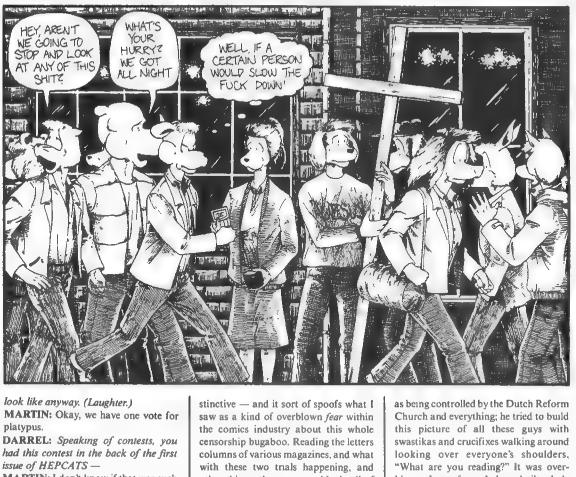
MARTIN: *(Laughter.)* Maybe I'll have a contest and people can decide what kind of animal she is.

DARREL: *Well, I vote for platypus — I don't know what they're supposed to*

Martin's University of Texas identification card . . . don't ask!



"Distributors started saying, 'This will appeal


HEY, AREN'T WE GOING TO STOP AND LOOK AT ANY OF THIS SHIT?
WHAT'S YOUR HURRY? WE GOT ALL NIGHT
WELL, IF A CERTAIN PERSON WOULD SLOW THE FUCK DOWN!

look like anyway. (Laughter.)

MARTIN: Okay, we have one vote for platypus.

DARREL: *Speaking of contests, you had this contest in the back of the first issue of HEPCATS —*

MARTIN: I don't know if that was such a good idea. *(Laughter.)*

DARREL: *This was the "Lansing, Illinois Fan Search." How did that come about?*

MARTIN: That's actually my weird sense of humor sort of playing itself out, and I guess it took a lot of readers by surprise. The whole thing was when all of the distributors had seen HEPCATS #1, the mock-up, they basically saw that it was sort of a funny animal/slice of life comic, and so immediately all of these distributors started plugging it in their catalogues saying "This will appeal to fans of OMAHA!" blah blah blah. And I went, "Uh oh!" I had just discovered OMAHA some months earlier in conjunction with guess what, the trials — the Friendly Frank's trial and the Comics Legends trial — and I knew this might scare some dealers off, thinking it's another sex book. Then I thought, "Nah, that won't happen, but maybe I can get some laughs out of it."

It's sort of poking fun at my own gun-shyness about it — it was purely instinctive — and it sort of spoofs what I saw as a kind of overblown *fear* within the comics industry about this whole censorship bugaboo. Reading the letters columns of various magazines, and what with these two trials happening, and other things, there were suddenly all of these people freaking out, making all of these doomsday predictions — "It's the '50s all over again, we're all going to be *censored!*" The whole attitude seemed to be taking the comics industry by storm — "Oh, God, the moral watchdogs are out and we're never going to be able to publish *anything* we want ever again!" I thought this was silly, that people were overreacting.

There *are* some noisy people and it's unfortunate, and a couple of people have been scapegoated and hurt by it, but it's going to blow over when the moral watchdogs find the next "good cause" that will get them headlines. A few years ago it was rock music. So my whole purpose with the "Lansing, Illinois Fan Search" thing was to satirize that attitude. You read the text of it and there's a lot of sarcasm there. It wasn't to criticize OMAHA, I don't think I made that point at all. I think it was clear that I was criticizing public *attitude*.

We had **Frank Miller** in WAP categorizing the whole Lansing, Illinois, area as being controlled by the Dutch Reform Church and everything; he tried to build this picture of all these guys with swastikas and crucifixes walking around looking over everyone's shoulders, "What are you reading?" It was overblown. Lots of people have built whole careers on double standards, getting up on their soapboxes and complaining, "Oh, look, all those mean moralistic people are picking on us." So I satirized this. And I've gotten a lot of letters from Illinois and none of them have been angry.

It doesn't seem to have caused too much of a stir, but some people may have taken it wrong. Who knows, it may not be something you want to do in your first issue — but maybe I better get people used to who I am! *(Laughter.)* I think some people have taken it wrong in that they thought . . . one guy in San Diego accused me of kowtowing to **Reverend Wildmon.** I'm like, "Are you at the second grade reading level yet?" *(Laughter.)* One guy thought that I was really selling those bikinis, it was *weird.*

DARREL: *Yeah, you've got that bikini advertisement on that same page.*

MARTIN: Maybe I hit people with my sense of humor a bit early, but it doesn't seem to have caused that much of a stir. I haven't gotten any angry mail, and I

to fans of OMAHA!' I went, 'Uh oh!'"

figure if it was something that would piss off somebody then they would write me. What I think really *is* kind of alarming about the whole thing, in retrospect, is that I haven't gotten any letters from Lansing. They may not be getting the book in Lansing. But I don't put that down to moral watchdogs as such; I'd put it down to it just being a new independent.

DARREL: *You mentioned double standards, what exactly do you mean by that?*

MARTIN: What I mean is that . . . for example, you have a guy like **Frank Miller** who has accomplished a great deal, but here's a man who's never *owned* a single character he has created. He gets together with a couple of guys and starts this magazine WAP in which they ostensibly are going to be giving creators a forum where they can perhaps get a little moral support in their battles with the nasty Big Two and everything, but what it actually turns into is a forum where they can sort of libel people without mentioning them by name so they don't get *sued* for libel — "Guess who did this, guess who did that." It's a very cliquish sort of thing.

And Frank's big thing, of course, is what he calls "creative freedom." What you have to understand, though, is when you've spent your entire career doing work for hire like **Frank Miller** has, like everyone who works for the Big Two, creative freedom is totally moot. When you're doing stories about characters that DC owns, DC has every goddamn right in the world to tell you what to do. They can call the shots and you know that when you sign that contract; everything trademarked and copyrighted by a corporation is *owned* by that corporation. You really start to sound like a little spoiled kid when you get up on your soapbox and start bitching and whining about how mean they are to you 'cause they made you cut this panel out of your book where the Joker was dressed up like **Madonna.** *(Laughter.)* Hey, you sign that contract, you sign that creative freedom away.

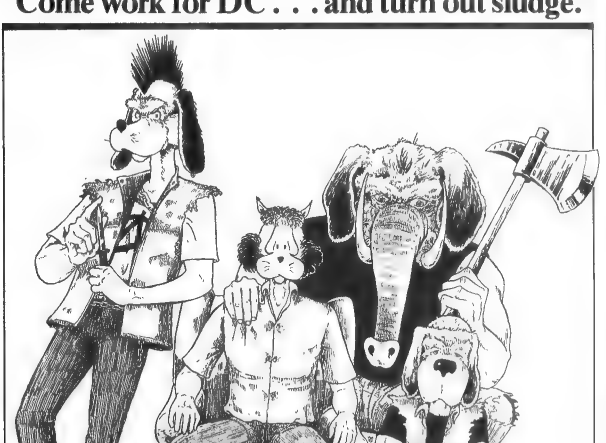
And then you have Frank's railing against censorship — which, of course, anyone in his right mind is against. But then what happens, **Bill Sienkiewicz** submits an editorial cartoon to WAP and **Frank Miller** censors it? He was afraid because **Bill** mentioned someone's name and Frank doesn't want WAP to get in trouble; but he's bitching about censorship all the time and then he censors something himself, that doesn't quite add up. But it's the sort of thing that I think is really pervasive in this industry. **Chris Warner** made a very good point: It's not so much that it's creative freedom these people are *really* whining about, it's their money. They want the absolute creative freedom that guys like me and **Dave Sim** have, but they want to get paid their nice juicy DC page rates at the same time.

DARREL: *It all comes down to the contract you sign.*

MARTIN: Yeah, it does. But this business is really funny. For some people work for hire is okay. I'm sure that there are a great many guys out there drawing comics for the majors and all they want to do in their lives is draw comics, draw those heroes they liked as kids, and they don't really have a whole lot of personal creative aspirations of their own. That's *fine.* I'm not going to sit and denigrate my colleagues, other people in the business, if they really want to go from

JEEZ, JOEY, I CAN'T BELIEVE YOU BOUGHT A GUINNESS BOOK!
SO WHAT'S WRONG WITH A LITTLE CHEAP INFOTAINMENT?
MAYBE I CAN BEAT MY MOM NOW AT TRIVIAL PURSUIT.
WELL, IT'S MORE FUN THAN HAVING TO READ A REAL TEXTBOOK, I GUESS.
OH, LOOK, GUNTHER! YOU MADE "WORLD'S BIGGEST PAIN IN THE ASS" AGAIN THIS YEAR!
Squish!

"Come work for DC . . . and turn out sludge."



one super-hero assignment to the next and they like what they do for a living. But when you start whining about things you knew you weren't going to get when you signed that deal, I don't know. There are aspects of this industry that appeal to all sorts of people, and of course there is more of *one* type of person than there is of another, and I guess there are more types that are comfortable with what is mainstream and status quo.

DARREL: *Well, that's what makes something mainstream, when more people like it than don't.*

MARTIN: Yeah, that's true. I must say, I respect **Frank Miller's** work. I didn't mean to pick on him, single him out that way.

One thing, though — not to rail on about this for too long — but one thing that I thought made it really kind of sickening and smarmy was when I was in San Diego the first time. There was a big DC booth in the dealers' room, I guess because they all want to seem hip and in touch with their fans. They had their booth in the expo hall where all the publishers and important people were, but they also had something in the dealers' room with a big DC logo that you could see from 500 feet in the air. *(Laughter.)* And there was a big sign that said "Join the DC Team" — this was to get all the guys there with their portfolios, and maybe one of the 9,000 guys who talked to them would get a call back

There was a sort of rotating group of DC people that would sit at this table, there were never less than four of them, and they were *all* wearing identical black golf shirts with the DC logo and their names embroidered on them. I was like, "These people look like gas station attendants!" *(Laughter.)* I'm serious. What it said to me — me being the jaded independent person — "Hi, come work for DC, we'll take away your individuality, your creativity, your own personal voice, and you'll be part of the work-for-hire team turning out the sludge we put out on a regular basis." I thought that was

"I take purely a creator's point of view."

really kind of repugnant. But, of course, I take purely a creator's viewpoint, and there were a big batch of kids around that table at all times. I guess it works for some people, but I kind of had a chill.

DARREL: *You mentioned OMAHA earlier, and HEPCATS does have at least one similarity to that series — Erica is an exotic dancer. How did that start?*

MARTIN: Actually, it started before I read OMAHA, before I discovered OMAHA. It even started long before I met my wife, who is a dancer. It was just a humorous thing to do. I had the story — you read it in YO — where Arnie had just met Erica and he was really happy, and Joey was *jealous*. Joey decided to take Arnie out to a tit bar, it was really a sort of a meretricious thing for Joey to do. They go to the topless bar and Arnie is kind of feeling out of place, and then lo and behold guess who's on the stage. It was kind of a funny story, not entirely unpredictable.

When YO came out some people said, "Yeah, I see a lot of similarities between HEPCATS and OMAHA." I said, "What's that?" The store where I bought my comics didn't carry adult stuff, not even a lot of alternative stuff, so I'd never heard of it. But that was when I was really starting to read THE COMICS JOURNAL fairly heavily and was paying attention to these trials and the censorship brouhaha and everyone panicking — all these guys being prosecuted, for God's sake, for selling adult comics! And one title that kept coming up over and over again was OMAHA THE CAT DANCER, so I *found* some copies at another comics shop down the road and started reading it.

I did decide, when I discovered the series and found out how popular it was, and what a reputation it was getting because of these trials, to tone down the dancer thing in the HEPCATS comic book. It was just a matter of, it would be a polite thing to do. But it was a coincidence, you know. The creative process . . . we're not all unique in the world, it happens all the time that the same ideas will be developed independently by different people. I was talking to **William Gibson** some years ago, I think I was interviewing him for a fanzine I was doing at the time, and he told me that BLADE RUNNER hit the theaters when he was halfway through NEUROMANCER and he was depressed for weeks. He said it was the longest time before he could actually sit down and work on that book again.

NEUROMANCER started that short-lived subgenre in science fiction called cyberpunk, which took '80s sensibilities and married them with early concepts like people linking their brains to computers and everything — very traditional science-fiction themes married to a very '80s hipness. And the most noticeable fact of the genre is the milieu is always

"I prefer to do continuing stories that go on

very *gritty* and very *real*. And **Gibson** pioneered this with NEUROMANCER where the world, basically, is **Ridley Scott's** Los Angeles from BLADE RUNNER. It's a very sharply realized milieu in the novel. The way **Gibson's** prose relates it, the images are *embedded* in your brain.

He had gone to all this *trouble* to create this world, and then he goes to see BLADE RUNNER and there it is. He walked out of that theater just totally down. These weird coincidences happen all of the time. You'll get this great idea and then turn on the TV and there it is, and you adapt to it or you just don't let it bother you. What I'm doing with HEPCATS is adapting to it. I'm not really going to be doing much of anything with Erica dancing, kind of out of respect for **Waller** and **Worley** and what they've got.

Also, I think I did my funniest dancer stories when I had the daily strip going, so I'm actually kind of burned out on that whole thing. My wife doesn't dance with the regularity she used to, so it's not so much a part of *my* life anymore. I don't really have much reason to do it anymore, and it's probably just as well because I don't want to have endless comparisons with other books by people who aren't able to appreciate each book for what it is itself

DARREL: *Now, the first two issues of the comic are single stories that are really slice of life type of things, but I understand that you're starting an extended story with issue #3. Why did you decide to do an extended story at this –*

MARTIN: So early on?

DARREL: *Yeah.*

MARTIN: Once again, that's not something that occurred to me. I kind of got into this publishing thing not knowing the rules. People have been saying, "Isn't it a little *early* starting a graphic novel in #3?" That took me by surprise. I think, actually, what better time to start a continuing saga and get people hooked on the series, get them wanting to buy it issue by issue, keep their interest. It makes sense to me.

But, of course, I had *always* planned on doing the HEPCATS comic book

WELL, HAVE YOU TALKED WITH ELROY
AND WHAT DOES HE THINK ABOUT HIS WHOLE SITUATION
TAK
TAK
EXCUSE ME
HOLD ON A SEC
YEAH?
HAVE YOU SEEN A GIRL WITH BLONDE HAIR IN A SORT OF OFF-WHITE JACKET WITH
YOU MEAN THAT CHICK WHO FAINTED?
YEAH. THE GUY SHE WAS WITH CAN REVIVE HER OFF THOUGH

and develop because it allows for continuity."

with continuing stories, that's how I think the best series work. Few people can pull off doing these short short stories. **The Hernandez Brothers** can do it, each issue of LOVE AND ROCKETS you have four or five short stories — *sometimes* they'll have a continuing thing. I prefer to do continuing stories, stories that go on and develop, because it allows for continuity to be very fluid, allows for character development to be very, *very* fluid.

And I had always wanted to do more with Erica than I did with her in the daily strip. I created her because I wanted there to be a girl in the strip, and it was neat to give Arnie a girlfriend, especially after the way I introduced him, but I didn't *just* want her to be "the girl in the strip," you know. I never had much of an opportunity to do much with her developmentally other than have her dancing, have the funny tit bar stories and all that. I never did much with her *personality*; I didn't feel like I *knew* her. When I was starting to expand HEPCATS, when I was starting to write my stories to where they included things like dramatic elements and it wasn't all ha-ha comedy, it seemed like this might be a neat thing to do. This is my exercise in getting to know Erica: what her life has been like, who she is, where she's been, what she's been through, where she's going. And as for starting it in issue #3, it seemed like the thing to do at the time. Kind of like getting married. *(Laughter.)*

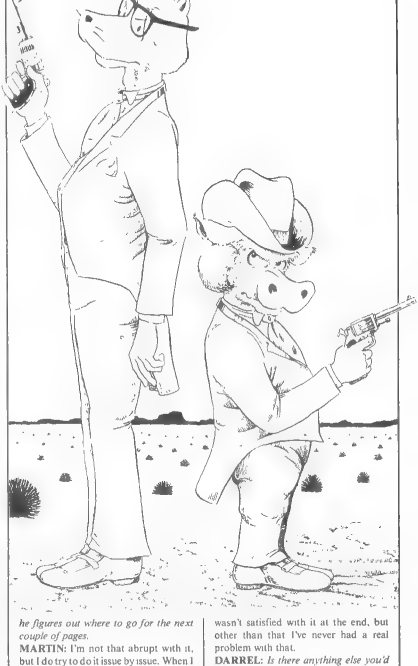
DARREL: *Well, it could be one of those things where it's a rule until somebody breaks it, and then they make another one.*

MARTIN: Could be. I've written it all the way through issue #20, so it's down there, and it's a fascinating and exciting story. I think people will really enjoy it.

DARREL: *You've written all eighteen parts?*

MARTIN: Yeah, and I'm actually starting to outline issue #21, the single-issue story after it. I do plan ahead. I don't plan too much, okay. I don't write from scripts. I try to outline everything so I'll know, for instance, in issue #7 such and such will happen. Then when the writing comes I try to keep it spontaneous. I don't put anything down firmly until I'm actually sitting at the drawing table, because I like that feeling of immediacy. And I'm *always* changing my mind in little ways. I like to have that element of unpredictability in my writing.

DARREL: *I think that's the way Dave Sim works. He does — I could be wrong — two or three pages at a time, and then he figures out where to go for the next couple of pages.*



MARTIN: I'm not that abrupt with it, but I do try to do it issue by issue. When I sit down to do an issue, I essentially have the issue completed in my head, and then page by page it's only a matter of what tiny little things I change. I'll suddenly decide to do a panel from a different angle, or I'll decide to finish the page with somebody saying something a little differently. I find it works fairly well for me. I redrew one page in #3 because I wasn't satisfied with it at the end, but other than that I've never had a real problem with that.

DARREL: *Is there anything else you'd like to add?*

MARTIN: Well, if you like good independents, if you like good stories, if you want to try a new book, I think you'll like HEPCATS. Fan response so far has been very good, so I am optimistic about the future of the series. Try an issue, see what you think. In the end the reader's the judge, you know.

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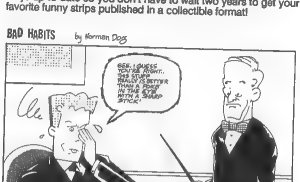
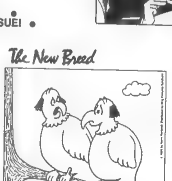


BIZARRO By DAN PIRARO
CHRIS ACCIDENTALLY WOUNDED HIM OUT OF SEASON, SO WERE PUTTING HIM UP TILL HE GETS BACK ON HIS FEET TO AVOID LITIGATION...



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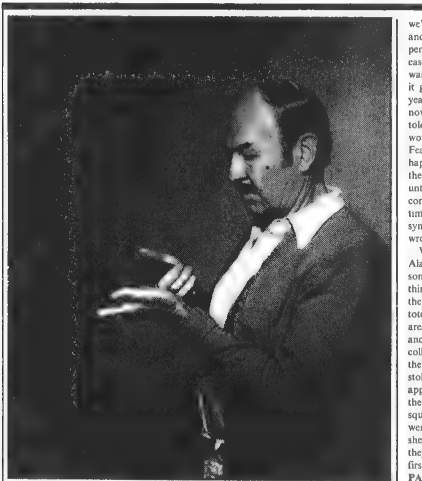
"Kirby, to me, was just too perfect. And predictable."



A recent photograph of John Prentice.

In the second part of this "Ripping" interview John Prentice goes from the torch on the Statue of Liberty to Mount Olympus, with Menaces, Mars and Hercules and gets introduced to females in bikinis without *navels . . .*

PAUL POWER: *Is there anything that you might have done differently in RIP KIRBY if you had total control of it? Is there a story that you wanted to do that hasn't been done yet, or would you have taken RIP KIRBY in another direction?*

JOHN PRENTICE: Well, I think over the years I would have made Kirby a little more human, with some frailties and faults like everybody else. You know, we've gone into the age of the antihero and that, and Kirby, to me, was just too perfect. And he was *predictable*. But it's easy to gradually work into it. You don't want to *shock* the reader, but you can do it gradually. Fred had a stroke a few years ago — and of course Fred is dead now, God bless his soul — but he had told King he'd had this stroke and he would just bow out, and I had told King Features *before* then that if anything happened to Fred that I wanted to write the strip. I told Fred that I would write until he felt better, and then he could come back and start writing it again any time he wanted to. So, I had to write a synopsis, which was okayed, and then I wrote that Alaska story.

We had never done a story about Alaska, and I wanted some snow and some different pictures and that kind of thing. So I came up with a story about the Alaskan Indians and this sacred totem pole. The Indians lived in a wild area, and I gave them a fictitious name, and I had this Indian girl who had been college educated contact Kirby to go up there and help them out. Somebody had stolen their sacred totem pole. It disappeared and their luck turned bad, there was no fish and game, they fell to squabbling among themselves, and they were talking about leaving their land, so she wanted to get this totem pole back so they could live happy again. That was the first story I wrote.

PAUL: *Did that refurbish your enthusiasm? Not that it had been diminished, but did that sort of pump you up more?*

JOHN: Yeah. Well, it's nice, you have more control. A lot of time if you have a script from a writer, you'll think of how it could be done differently simply because of the way you draw. Of course a writer can't be expected to visualize it the way an artist does. But when you *combine* the writing and the artwork, you have more control of the story, of the excitement

JOHN PRENTICE

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"A writer can't be expected to visualize it the way an artist does."

and the action. So, that's one advantage of writing for yourself, you do have that latitude.

PAUL: *It can be tougher, too.*

JOHN: Well, writing's tough work. *(Laughter.)* Going back to Fred, when he recovered from the stroke, he started writing again, until unfortunately he had a worse stroke and passed away.

PAUL: *Was the first time that you two played around with more offbeat stories the Mt. Olympus story that you did?*

JOHN: Oh, yeah. Well, the Mt. Olympus story was Greek mythology, you know. How do you get a modern day detective back in ancient Greece, on good old Mt. Olympus? Fred had him meet these strange characters when he and Desmond went hiking in the California mountains, a guy dressed like Hercules, big, strong, and another guy dressed like Zeus. They said, "Mr. Kirby, come with us." Of course he didn't like being ordered around and they ended up in a fight. *(Laughter.)*

PAUL: *I thought that was pretty wild.*

JOHN: Yeah. What happened then, of course, is Kirby's knocked out. Lightning struck a tree — near them a storm was coming up — and they were knocked unconscious. Then Hercules and Zeus carried Kirby and Desmond to their boat and sailed to Mt. Olympus, where they met all of the other gods, including Aphrodite. Of course she was the goddess of love, so she made a pass at him. *(Laughter.)* Every god had a message they wanted brought back to humanity. One of them — I forget which god this was — was concerned with us littering the moon. She took Kirby to the moon and showed him all of the stuff the astronauts had left there, all of their *junk*. Of course Mars, the god of war, wanted more wars. Aphrodite wanted lessons of love brought back. But the way they got around it, they actually came to by this tree that the lightnng had struck, so you really didn't know whether the whole thing was a dream or what.

PAUL: *But the problem is, of course, Desmond had the same dream as well. How can you share the same dream?*

JOHN: Well, that's true.

PAUL: *Did you enjoy drawing that one?*

JOHN: Oh, yeah! Well, it's funny, I had to research the Greek gods — you'd be *surprised* at how many variations there *are* on Hercules. Everybody drew him completely differently. The one that somehow stuck in my mind was him with the lionskin on, so that's the way I drew him.

PAUL: *I thought that was incredible. That great fight with Kirby and Hercules, I went, "Man!" (Laughter.) And you drew another cartoonist, Frank Baldwin —*

JOHN: Yes, I drew him as Hermes.

PAUL: *That must have been a lot of fun.*

JOHN: Yeah, it was fun. I had in there . . . what are the two guys that flew, Icarus and . . . made wings out of feathers and wax. Icarus and Daedalus? They met them, they were working on the wings. *(Laughter.)*

PAUL: *What about the science-fiction tale that you did? You didn't do too many of those, was there only one?*

JOHN: There's only one that I remember. We had the lost city of Atlantis. We did a brief history and it *was* covered by the sea, but the people of Atlantis *knew* that that was going to happen, so they moved out before. They built a city in the Amazon rain forest, beneath this huge canopy of trees — a very modern city. And they had flying saucers and that kind of thing.

PAUL: *The power of invisibility.*

JOHN: Well, the people of Atlantis were all peace loving, honest people — there was no war, there was no crime, there was no fighting. They had found a lost baby,

I SAY, UNDERWOOD, OLD CHAP, THAT SOUNDS FASCINATING! THANKS FOR KEEPING ME POSTED...
OKAY, DOC, I'LL HAVE YOU READY IN NO TIME.
MAKE ME LOOK TIRED AND WORRIED, PANCAKE. I HAVE TO PUT ON A LITTLE ACT OF MY OWN...
THAT'S HETTIE COLLEC SCHE

"We had good response on the flying saucer story."

took it into Atlantis to raise, and she grew up as a normal human with all the frailties and so on that humans have, and she mounted a revolution to overthrow the government. The leaders of Atlantis just didn't know how to deal with this kind of thing, because they didn't know violence, so the leader of Atlantis sent his daughter to bring Rip Kirby in to help him solve the problem. She flew into Central Park in an invisible flying saucer, knocked on Kirby's door, and while she and Desmond and Kirby were talking, she hypnotized them, then took them to her invisible flying saucer and flew them to Atlantis

PAUL: *There's a great show where they fly around the Statue of Liberty.*

JOHN: Yeah, that's when Kirby was getting away. He was in the thing and he didn't know how to fly it, so he was circling the Statue of Liberty and the Empire State Building, and finally crashed into the sea. *(Laughter.)* The New York cops came after him in a helicopter and speedboats. They saw the thing, they thought it was a flying saucer — which it was — so this one cop pulls him out and says, "Alright, space man, you speakum English?" *(Laughter.)*

PAUL: *What was the reader response to those two stories?*

JOHN: We had some good response on the flying saucer story, the lost city of Atlantis. A lot of people liked that. Some fans were very *excited* about seeing a space type story. The other one, the Greek mythology, the only comment I got on that was from **Hank Ketcham** who draws DENNIS THE MENACE. He thought it was too big a departure from the strip, he didn't like that as much

These two RIP KIRBY strips appeared immediately after Alex Raymond's fatal sports car accident — 1956.

UNDERWOOD OVERHEARD EVERYTHING, SIR, IT BEING QUITE PROPER AS NO SECRECY WAS INVOLVED. THE EXPERIMENT GOES ON TONIGHT..
TELL ME MORE, DESMOND..
THIS IS BEGINNING TO LOOK SERIOUS. I MAY HAVE TO CHECK INTO IT... AND I BET I DON'T END UP A DAY YOUNGER!

INE. NOW TO CALL ON HILTON AND START ING ON OUR ME...
DON'T RUB OFF THE WORRY LINES...
WHY, DOCTOR, YOU LOOK SO TIRED, SO WORN. WHAT HAS HAPPENED?
BAD NEWS, MISS HILTON. I'M AFRAID MY RESEARCH WORK IS ENDED!

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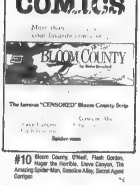

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"They have mutilated bodies and nudes on the front page."

as the other stories.

PAUL: *Did you do many others after that, that departed like that?*

JOHN: No. There was one where Kirby and Desmond ended up in Harmony, the town that time forgot.

PAUL: *Oh, yeah! That's one that Al Williamson wrote with you.*

JOHN: Yeah, right. It was a town set in the 1890s, the gay nineties, and it was protected by a steep range of mountains on one side and a raging river on the other side. They were still living the way that they had in the 1890s.

PAUL: *And Kirby had to do some bare knuckle fighting in that.*

JOHN: Yeah. They had a world champion — they called him the world champion — in Harmony. He was called John L. Mulligan. *(Laughter.)* He would walk into the bar and say, "I can lick any man in the house." And he picked on Kirby, so they set up a bare knuckle prize fight. Desmond was his trainer. He would spar with Desmond, and he said, "Listen, Desmond, can't you get a little bit more steam in that left hook." *(Laughter.)* Then the way they got out of the place, they found a guy like one of the **Wright Brothers,** he was trying to build an airplane. Kirby helped him work on it. He bought the airplane for something like $10, and they flew out in this **Wright Brothers** type airplane. And they've gone back about twice. Of course now they just fly in by helicopter. *(Laughter.)*

PAUL: *Now that the strip has been shrunk down —*

JOHN: Since they reduced the size of it in the papers, yeah.

PAUL: *How did you feel about that?*

JOHN: Oh, I felt like all of the other guys, I felt terrible about it. They're going to get so small that you can't read them. I had to make the lettering bigger, and I had to simplify the drawing, because the reproduction is so bad when the papers shrink it down so small. You have to adapt. You try to make the thing *look* bigger, and one way you do that is if you can get a drawing going clear to the top of the panel. You put the balloon on the bottom or on the side or something, just to try to get the drawing to go clear to the top. You can't do it in all of the panels, but you do it when you can do it.

And now we have a tough time competing, because it has to be very puritanical stuff in the daily newspapers. The editors just don't want anything there that's going to shock the kids. I mean, they can have mutilated bodies and nudes on the front page, anything, but the comic strips they want as pure as the driven snow

PAUL: *I've always thought that was funny. Have you seen MODESTY BLAISE, what they do in that?*

JOHN: Sure, yeah. The Europeans have

ONE MOMENT, MR. KIRBY. I HAVE AN IMPORTANT MESSAGE FOR YOU!
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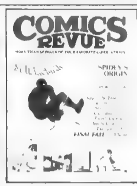

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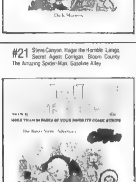

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"When I have somebody getting shot — it's off panel."

REALLY, MR. HERMES, THIS IS ALL QUITE HIGH-HANDED.
YOUR FRIEND KIRBY IS FOOLISH. NO ONE HAS EVER BESTED HERCULES IN A TEST OF STRENGTH...

always have been very broad-minded about that. Although it's funny, one of the only complaints I ever got about that kind of thing was from a French newspaper.

PAUL: *Really?*

JOHN: I had a guy — and it was an integral part of the story, because you had to know how ruthless he was, how cold-blooded he was — to show how ruthless this guy was, a couple of underlings that had botched a job came into his office and he shot both of them down. Usually when I have somebody getting shot in RIP KIRBY, which isn't too often, it's off panel. You'll see the guy firing the gun in one panel, then maybe you'll see the guy who got shot laying on the ground in the next panel. This time I had them shot in the *same* panel. And the *French* newspaper got upset about that? *(Laughter.)* I didn't hear anything from the American newspapers. That was a long time ago.

PAUL: *Didn't you have a restriction on the bathing suits you could use?*

JOHN: Well, there was. There's a lot more latitude now, but for *years* King Features didn't want you to put a girl in a bikini. If she was in a two-piece bathing suit, it had to cover up the belly button. I finally called **Sylvan Beck** and said, "I'd like to draw girls in bikinis. They've been wearing them for years, and now it looks *funny* to have a girl in a one-piece bathing suit." At that time the only time you saw a one-piece bathing suit was in a beauty contest, everywhere else they wore bikinis. He was very hesitant about it, and he finally said, "Well, go ahead, but be sure you do it in good taste." *(Laughter.)* And then somebody at the syndicate blotted out the belly button. *(Laughter.)*

PAUL: *With Fred as the writer, I've always wondered why you didn't do an Australian type story, since Kirby travels the world.*

JOHN: I always thought Fred *was* going to do that, because he talked about it. Of course, I didn't see Fred for years, he lived in Florida and mailed me the script, and if there was ever any problem, I'd just call him on the phone. But I always expected an Australian story from Fred.

PAUL: *Well, you still do a lot of freelance stuff.*

JOHN: Yes, I do illustrations. I do advertising and editorial illustration now and then, when I can spare the time from RIP KIRBY. I enjoy that, it's a different kind of thing.

PAUL: *Yeah, I've seen some and they're quite nice. Do you still get a chance to paint?*

JOHN: No. I *love* to paint, but I just

"The readers would complain, especially the

A MYSTERIOUS PERFORMANCE PUZZLES NEW ARRIVALS.
WHAT, HO, WIGGERS? WHY ARE YOU WAVING YOUR SHIRT?
BLESS MY SILVER POLISH! I CAN'T SHOUT BACK OR ACRID WILL BE IN HERE WITH HIS DRATTED SCIMITAR...
THAT HAS TO BE A DISTRESS SIGNAL! COME ON, DESMOND
Paul Gravett

never have the time for it. I think I've got two paintings that I've done in the last 20 years

PAUL: *One piece of yours I remember is the wash illustration of the girl getting undressed.*

JOHN: *(Laughter.)*

PAUL: *What was Leonard Starr's reaction to that when he saw it?*

JOHN: Well, he knew he was going to be in it. He and I were sharing a studio then. I had a model up, and I took photographs and all sorts of stuff — and then, of course, I photographed him separately. *(Laughter.)*

PAUL: *There was a strip that Leonard told me about, a science-fiction thing that he was doing for Dargaud, and you drew three pages?*

JOHN: Oh, yeah.

PAUL: *What happened there?*

JOHN: Well, Leonard was going to write it and I was going to draw it, and they wanted me to do three pages for the publisher. I did the three pages and they paid me for them, and about that time it seemed to me like everything was going downhill over there. The business just wasn't there, it wasn't making the money it was before. And I didn't do them just for the page rate, I was doing them for the *royalties* later. And . . Dargaud had an office over here at that time, and that wasn't working out. I just sort of let it die. I didn't say any more about it, and *they* didn't say any more about it. I really would have loved to have done it, but I didn't want to go through *all* that work and then not get any royalties, so it just sort of fizzled out.

PAUL: *But that would have got you back to a larger sized format —*

JOHN: Oh, I would have loved it. You know, it would have been processed color and the whole thing.

PAUL: *Would you have colored it as well?*

JOHN: I don't know. I might have let them color the first one, but I'm not sure. I would have liked to have colored it myself, but they do a great job, a fantastic job.

PAUL: *Do you think that might happen in the future?*

JOHN: I don't know. They tell me that the business is slow over there now. I don't know what caused it.

PAUL: *Now, I've always liked the comic books and the superhero stuff, but I've always* really *loved the adventure comic strips. From my background in working in film doing storyboards, I've found that the work by yourself, Raymond, Stan Drake and Leonard Starr to be very very cinematic.*

JOHN: The long underwear stuff just never did appeal to me, I never really wanted to draw it.

PAUL: *Did you ever draw any of it?*

JOHN: No, I never did. This thing that Leonard wrote and I was drawing for Dargaud wasn't really a science-fiction thing. It started off in the Vietnam War. The guy was secretly captured by the Russians and brainwashed and stuff, and they picked him to capture because he was a super athlete anyway. But he was a normal guy, he didn't have huge muscles. They were developing him into a weapon to send back to this country where he would do their bidding. And of course he was helpless, he really didn't know why he was doing this stuff. And then there was another hero that was on his trail trying to track him down. But see, he *escaped* from the Russians, this guy did — but he still didn't know why he reacted the way he did. It would have been a terrific story.

PAUL: *Now, you took over RIP KIRBY in 1956, which was over 30 years ago.*

JOHN: Yeah.

PAUL: *How do you feel about that? There's work that you did before that, for DC, Marvel, Simon & Kirby, the other comic-book stuff, and then you took over RIP KIRBY and have stayed with it all these years. How do you feel about that?*

JOHN: RIP KIRBY has been very good to me. I'm not happy about the newspapers printing them in such a small size, but on the other hand I'm very pleased about the sales in Europe. People are very *familiar* with it over there, much

NATURALLY, WE HAVE FILED A FALSE FLIGHT PLAN, SO WE MUST FLY VERY HIGH TO AVOID --AH-- COMPLICATIONS.
I WOULDN'T HAVE IT ANY OTHER WAY.
AND SO NO ONE WILL KNOW WHERE WE GO!
A SHORT TIME LATER.
PLEASE USE THIS OXYGEN MASK NOW, WE SHALL SOON ATTAIN GREAT ALTITUDE.
BUT KIRBY'S MASK IS CONNECTED TO A VERY SPECIAL TANK.

women, that Rip Kirby was being unfaithful."

more than they are here. When I was over in Italy in '76, they had eight big RIP KIRBY albums on the stands all at one time, and they were bringing stuff up I drew twenty-something years ago. I guess they intend to keep printing and bring it right up to date. So, that part is nice.

PAUL: *Tell us about your trip. How was your reception over there?*

JOHN: Oh, wonderful, it was a wonderful trip. We were at — well, you were there, it was fantastic — an exhibition of cartoonists from all over the world. You have lunch one day with an Englishman and a Spaniard and an Italian, and then you have dinner that night with a Yugoslav and so on, and within two or three days everybody knows everybody, you're all friends. And then, of course, they have this *gorgeous* old opera house, and all of the cartoonists put on slide shows and that kind of thing. Then they have this huge tent in the park there, selling books from all over the world. And when someone is up speaking, they have simultaneous translation.

PAUL: *Yeah. I was up there, and I was a little bit drunk. (Laughter.) Well, I was nervous. I'd tell a joke, you know, and I'd be thinking, "Well, come on, people." It's bizarre having to wait for the translators to tell the joke. (Laughter.) But it was fun. How was yours?*

JOHN: Well, I had a lot of slides from RIP KIRBY, a lot of illustrations that I had done, and a couple of paintings. They showed the slides up there on the screen — you're down on the stage with a microphone — and I just described what each one was, and what part of the story it was in, or what the illustrations were for, and how I did it. Then the American contingent put on another show later on, where we all got up and drew.

PAUL: *Well, have you any regrets of having worked on KIRBY?*

JOHN: No, oh no. I still enjoy doing it. Sometimes I like to do something different, so I'll do an illustration or

something like that, in color, and then by the time I finish that I'm glad to get back on KIRBY again. It rekindles my interest.

PAUL: *Yeah, I'm a strong believer in not letting yourself burn out. Have you ever suffered burn out on KIRBY during all these years?*

JOHN: I guess I have on one or two occasions, when I would just be working so many hours that I needed to take some time off.

PAUL: *A lot of the strip artists seem to work tremendous hours, especially with the straight illustration for the adventure strips. The research —*

JOHN: Oh, sometimes that can kill you. Sometimes the research can make a job three times as tough. Fred wrote a story once that I could have *throttled* him for. The setting was New York City. He had a boat chase down the Hudson River, avoiding tugboats and the whole thing, between a cabin cruiser and a speedboat. Then the chase went all around Liberty Island and the Statue of Liberty, and there was a helicopter following all of this. Then they had a chase up *through* the interior of the Statue of Liberty, clear up to the *torch!* Kirby jumps out of the helicopter, on top of the torch —

PAUL: *Oh, I remember that one!*

JOHN: Well, do you know how *hard* it is to find interior shots of the Statue of Liberty? And that arm had been closed off for years, *nobody* went up to the torch. I spent a tremendous amount of time trying to get something on the inside of that, and I finally wound up drawing most of it from blueprints. I probably spent more time researching that thing than I did drawing it.

PAUL: *Wow. I remember . . . wasn't that a Mangler story?*

JOHN: No, Count Von Krupp was the villain in that story. The girl in it was Holly Blowstep.

PAUL: *What happened to the girl that KIRBY had in the very beginning?*

JOHN: We brought her back, Honey Dorian.

PAUL: *Why was she written out of the strip?*

JOHN: Fred began complaining about it, because she was Kirby's girlfriend, and when he would think of a good story, he'd have him meeting some other girl, have a romance involved with another girl. The readers would complain, especially the women, that Rip Kirby was being unfaithful — and Fred felt it was limiting his style. So he quit writing her in for a long time, just so Kirby could have other romances. She just didn't show up

HOW IS OUR GUEST? IT WOULD BE OUR LIVES IF HE GUESSED THE LOCATION OF TREASURE HAVEN FROM OUR COURSE.
HE IS DIFFICULT TO PUT TO SLEEP BUT THE GAS MUST WORK...
THIS... MORE THAN OXYGEN... MIGHT HAVE SUSPECTED.... THEY.... THEY...
THERE ARE THINGS IT IS BETTER NOT TO KNOW. BREATHE DEEPLY, MY DARLING.

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"What I would really like to do is paint."

THE PLANE BRINGS THE SLUMBERING KIRBY TO A REMOTE PLACE.
DRINK THIS. IT WILL CLEAR AWAY THE MISTS.
NO, THANK YOU. I DISTRUST THE AIDS I'VE BEEN GETTING...
AND A SHORT TIME LATER.
WHAT DO YOU THINK?
IT'S UNBELIEVABLE ...A DREAM.
JOHN PRENTICE
THIS HAS ALWAYS BEEN HOME TO ME...
AH, BE IT EVER SO HUMBLE!
GOOD-BYE, WE SHALL MEET WITH GRANDFATHER CROSS AT DINNER. SOMEONE WILL SHOW YOU TO YOUR ROOM...
THANKS. I HOPE IT HAS A VIEW OF THE MOAT.
SOMETHING ABOUT THAT SCULPTURE. IT'S ODDLY FAMILIAR...
KIRBY HAS REACHED TREASURE HAVEN.
OF COURSE, I REMEMBER READING ABOUT THIS MICHELANGELO WORK! IT VANISHED FROM THE MUSEUM 100 YEARS AGO.
YOU HAVE BEAUTIFUL THINGS HERE. I SUPPOSE VISITORS COME FROM ALL OVER TO SEE THEM.
OH, NO, SIR!
YOU ARE THE FIRST OUTSIDER PERMITTED TO ENTER IN 50 YEARS...
JOHN PRENTICE

in the strip. Kirby *was* a single bachelor, after all. And then after several years of that, so many people began asking about Honey Dorian that he finally decided to bring her back again.

PAUL: *Well, getting back to the research and all, how much attention do you pay to stuff like that?*

JOHN: Well, you know, you try to be authentic and research everything, and have everything work properly. But you do screw up every now and then. I had one story where I had an ancient flintlock used in a murder. The villain got Kirby's gun secretly, fired a bullet from it into a pillow, and then he took the bullet and put it into a smoothbore flintlock. He killed a guy with it, and of course when the cops checked the bullet, they found out it was from Kirby's gun. The smoothbore doesn't leave any striations on the bullet.

So, I got pictures of a flintlock, showed a close-up of the hand firing the gun and all of that. I got letters from all over! A flintlock wouldn't fire with the frizzen in that position, the frizzen was in the wrong position! *(Laughter.)* I got a letter from the **Earl of Scarsdale!** So after that I went out and bought one and found out how the thing worked, so I have used it subsequently.

PAUL: *Are you a sportsman? What hobbies do you have?*

JOHN: Well, I play golf every now and then. What I'd really like to do is paint. I'd really like to get my schedule set up in such a way to have time to paint. I made a Thanksgiving sign for my wife's store, a turkey trashing a pilgrim. *(Laughter.)*

PAUL: *What do you think you would have done if you hadn't gotten RIP KIRBY?*

JOHN: I would have been in illustration. I was almost *all* into illustration at that time, 90 percent of my work was illustration. I would do a story for DC once in awhile.

PAUL: *Did you enjoy doing the comic books back then?*

JOHN: Yes. The only quarrel I had with comic books was that it was really a production business. You had to draw very fast to make any money. I never liked the fact that I couldn't take my time and put more into it. I always wanted to do better work, and yet the time limitations and the money said that you had to knock it out fast. That was one reason I enjoyed illustration, you could get paid well enough to take your time to do a good job. And that was also true with RIP KIRBY, I had more time and could do more complete drawings.

PAUL: *Well, if you hadn't done RIP KIRBY, do you think you would have progressed into doing your own strip?*

JOHN: No, I don't think so. I never had any big desire to try to sell a new strip. I

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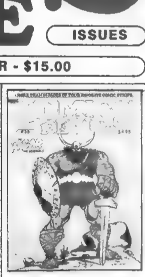

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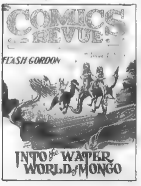

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#46 Flash Gordon, Modesty Blaise, Bloom County, Lingo, The Phantom, Calvin and Hobbes, Steve Canyon, Batman, Gasoline Alley

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"It's stimulating to do something different — new."

was going almost completely towards illustration, that's what I was doing. I had done some industrial comics, advertising kind of stuff, but even that was more illustration than comics.

PAUL: *Is there anything else that you'd like to add?*

JOHN: Well . . . I don't know about the future of the strip. I think the future of it is on television and in the movies.

PAUL: *Have you thought about going to that?*

JOHN: I've *thought* about it, but I don't know how to do it. *(Laughter.)* I did one storyboard for a television commercial, that's the nearest contact I've had with that.

PAUL: *Well, I'd like to see that happen, I think it would be very sad for a cartoonist to be totally divorced from his medium. But then you might be very tired of this.*

JOHN: I'm not really tired of it, but I'm always interested in new things. You know, it's *stimulating* to do something different, something new. That's why I'd like to keep doing illustration. But the storyboard, that turned out to be fun. For a long time I wouldn't do anything like that. I had my scruples, what I felt were my scruples, and I wouldn't do anything that wasn't going to be reproduced. For instance, one time my agent asked me to do a job in New York, it was an illustration for a photographer. It was a tire ad and it was for a magazine, and the photographer was going to shoot this very expensive car, like a Cadillac or a Lincoln Continental, in front of a posh hotel, with very aristocratic looking people getting out of the car. And he wanted a wash drawing of it. Well, I did that and I got paid well for it, but somewhere around the end there I got to thinking, "Jesus Christ, this photographer, I'm doing all of his thinking for him and he's going to make more money than I do. I've done all of the *work* here, he just gets the props and sets them up and so on." And it was never going to be reproduced anywhere.

So then for a long time I wouldn't do anything like that. But then somebody wanted me to do a storyboard job, and I thought, "Well, gee, I've never done that before, I'll try it." And actually it was *fun!* I could do anything I wanted with it. It was a wild storyboard. It started out with this guy getting out of his office chair and walking right up into the swirling clouds — which is a pretty imaginative start for a commercial. So, I had fun with that. The only thing is they did a stupid thing. They wanted this cough syrup going down the throat, you know. That's been done a million times, usually in profile. This guy thought he'd do it a different way. He was going to have this plastic head with the throat and everything made up, and have it facing you. He hadn't had it made up yet, but I was supposed to draw it. When I saw it I said, "You know, that's going to look like hell." He says, "What do you mean?" In the storyboard you pour the cough syrup in the mouth and then you tilt it up and the cough syrup runs down. I said, "The cough syrup's going to run right down his chin." *(Laughter.)* "No, no, I've got it figured out, it'll work." So, sure enough, it looked like the guy slobbering all over himself! *(Laughter.)*

PAUL: *Is there any other type of comic strips or anything that you would have liked to have done?*

JOHN: Well, if financially it would be worth my while to do, I'd like to do some of the European albums. I'd like to have done that one I started. But, Jesus, it's a whole *book*. If I'm just getting paid page rate, not going to get any royalties, what's the point? Dargaud, I forget, they yanked something like 90 titles off the stands in Europe. Those things weren't selling that great here, but they sold *tremendously* in Europe. But they just got overloaded, produced too many. I guess it was like what happened to the comics industry here that time when we got too many titles. A lot of them went out of business.

PAUL: *It gets to the point where it doesn't matter if there are any readers, the dealers just can't stay in front of it. I mean, they get by from week to week as it is, so if something happens and they get stuck with a lot of titles, what do they do next week when another ton comes in and they can't even pay the shipping?*

JOHN: Yeah. What would be fun — I've toyed with the idea but I probably will never do anything about it — is doing Western art, like **Jim Bama**. Several years ago he had an exhibit that I went up to see, and he was happy as a clam. He was doing *exactly* what he wanted and he was making more money than he ever made in his life. And he doesn't paint Westerns the way some of the other guys do. He actually paints people. He doesn't have the big landscapes and the horses and the cattle. He said if he were up on the Cape, he'd be painting fishermen instead of cowboys.

And he'll paint modern day cowboys, too. He'll paint rodeo riders and stuff like that. Do you know, he'll do things like he'll take a saddle, an old saddle — he lives in Wyoming — and he'll put it out in the yard and wait for it to smell. And then at the first light snow he'll go out and take slides of it, the saddle with snow on it, and he'll make a painting of that. That's the way he gets his stuff. I think it's terrific what he does.

PAUL: *Do you think you might take a crack at it?*

JOHN: I've been thinking about it for years, but it's a question of income again. You know, you're going into a whole new field, and if you quit work then your income stops while you're doing all of this stuff. But **Jim Bama** did it. He just left, took two years out, made paintings, and came back and had an exhibit. I don't know, I might just do that someday.

NO TIME TO STUDY THIS PICTURE AND NOTE STAN GAVE ME. I HEAR DESMOND ADMITTING COMPANY...
DEAD?
YES, JUST A MOMENT AGO...
WE SHOULD BE IN NEW YORK WITHIN AN HOUR, MISS MONA.
THANK YOU, ERIC. IF ALL GOES WELL, WE SHALL NOT BE THERE LONG...
FANTASTIC!

"Sysopping is like being the editor of a

COMPU-SERVE

Computers have become an ubiquitous part of modern life . . . a fact that even holds true for a primarily graphic medium such as comic books. So many fans own computers that they have banded together into a communications group on CompuServe.

What's CompuServe? Well, Doug Pratt and Jim Pertierra explain that, as well as a good deal more about computer communications for comics fans and pros, in the following chat . . .

PATRICK DANIEL O'NEILL: *Why don't you start by giving COMICS INTERVIEW's readers – who may have no idea what we're talking about – a rundown on what CompuServe and the Comics Forum are?*

DOUG PRATT: CompuServe is the world's largest network devoted to personal computers. The beauty of CompuServe, I think, is that you can log on to it with anything – anything that you can stick a modem on or hot-wire into a telephone somehow will talk to CompuServe. I have two users that I know of who are logging on with old 110-baud teletype terminals with the rolls of Grade-Z yellow paper that roll through them.

PAT: *My God, you're kidding . . .* (Laughter.)

DOUG: Hey, CompuServe doesn't care – it runs it! It's not limited to a specific amount of memory. Of course, there's a lot of computer-related stuff there, because that's where CompuServe came from. No matter what kind of computer you've got, they've got services for it. They're tied into the Associated Press and various wire services and things like the airline reservation system – through which you can make reservations on airlines or at hotels. I use that quite a lot. It has electronic mail worldwide with connections to Telex and fax. It's a very sophisticated service.

But the most delightful part of this strange thing, which has over half-a-million subscribers worldwide, are the things called forums. If you've ever heard of a bulletin board system, you have a vague idea of what a forum is. A forum is sort of a BBS with a thyroid problem – it's a lot bigger and more sophisticated and somewhat more complicated than a typical bulletin board. It's a way of leaving messages and receiving messages from people all over the world, essentially.

Forums are divided into three parts,

Below: Doug Pratt with two of his models. Next page: Jim grins for COMICS INTERVIEW.

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magazine, only faster. Responses are a lot faster."

not unlike Gaul. The message board is probably the most obvious and active part. Our message board is divided up into different sections related to different things such as comic books, newspaper comic strips and animation. Then we have a series of data libraries set up the same way, where the big files live and you can read things like **Pat Mullet's** weekly review of what he thinks are the most notable comics released that week, various captures of various discussions happening on the Forum and articles that get uploaded frequently from Forum members. Then there's the conferencing area, which is really unique. In the conference rooms, you can type something, hit return or enter and what you typed pops up on everybody else's screen with your name attached. We all get together at specific times. The Japanese animation crowd gets together every Sunday night; every other Wednesday we have a comic-book chat; sometimes we do specialized things. They're great fun for a couple of hours, where you get to sit at the keyboard and respond to the silly things other people say.

If I had to capsulize the Comic Forum, I'd compare it to a convention. At conventions, people walk around wearing funny suits and little badges that say "Hello, my name is . . ." It's very similar. You can log into Comics Forum by typing "GO COMIC" and if you want to see who else is wearing a "Hello, my name is . . ." badge, you type "UST" for user status and it shows you a list of who's there. If somebody else is on line, you can make their terminal beep and send them a message and try to talk them into meeting you in a conference room.

When you log in, the system tells you if there are messages waiting for you; you can go to those immediately and read them and answer them. You can browse through the message board which remembers the last message you read - so you don't have to read through all the old messages. With some very simple plain English commands, you can look through all the messages, scan them by subject; if there's one you want to read, you read it; if you want to chip in your two-cents worth, you type "REP" for reply and enter a reply. Eventually, these messages build up a number of replies, and replies to the replies, and they build into what we call a thread — which becomes like a conversation. The nice thing is you can do it whenever and for however long you please. You don't have to be there at a certain specific time — you can pop in when it's convenient and join in these long-distance conversations.

VITAL STATISTICS

Name: Doug Pratt
Home: Herndon, VA
Occupation: Special projects director, Academy of Model Aeronautics; sysop, Comics Forum, CompuServe Information Service
Other interests: Model trains, marionette animation a la **Gerry Anderson.**
Claim to fame: Lives on John Milton Dr. "a great street for a writer to live on."

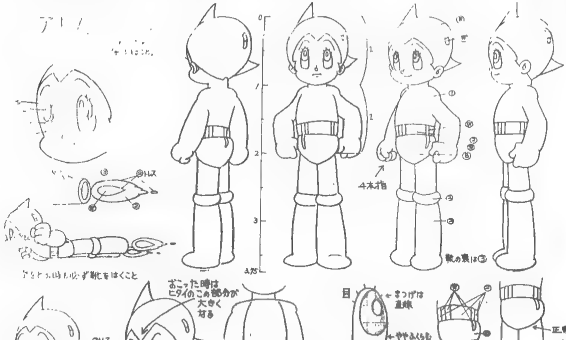
Name: Jim Pertierra
Home: Troy, NY
Occupation: Budget/ mechanization manager, New York Telephone
Entry into comics fandom: Roped in by the comic rack at a mall bookstore; hid it from his wife with the biggest book he could find in the store.
Charity: Gives used modems to desperate freelance writers.

PAT: *You're the system operator for the Comics Forum. What does a sysop do?*

DOUG: I'm in charge of the overall operations. I have a contract with CompuServe to provide this information and to run this three-ring circus. Sysopping is a little like being the editor of a magazine, only faster. You get your responses a lot faster. There's a good deal of writing involved, but for the most part it's organization. I'm the one who has to keep the overview and think about how to accommodate people when they get lost. The sysop is the one who answers new members' questions. My goal is that anyone who comes in and leaves a message gets an answer, no matter what. I want to try and maintain the tone of the joint and make it a friendly place to be, on the order of Munden's Bar, I suppose.

CompuServe has over 200 forums, each of which is run by a sysop or sysops. There is one main sysop for each forum and a group of assistants: **Steve Bennett**, who has actually been with the Comic Forum for longer than I have — his big area of interest is Japanese animation, a very strong section for us; **Nick Varga**, who runs a little comics store in Cleveland, Ohio (of all places) Comics Specialties and he reports to us on industry news, what comics have been shipped, and what's been back-ordered and back-ordered some more and backlisted some after that, and **Jim Pertierra**,

"I started a forum called ModelNet — which I still run."



A forum is devoted to Japanese animation such as Astro Boy, above, circa 1965.

here, a general all-around handyman in the comic-book section.

Assistant sysops are responsible for doing various things, for instance: If somebody leaves a message and doesn't include the recipient's user ID number, then that person will not be told there's a message waiting for him or her. An assistant sysop can add the user ID number to make sure that people get their messages. Occasionally, an assistant sysop will see a message that's important and will know that the recipient is unlikely to be on line for the next week or so; they will forward that message to electronic mail. Quite often, the messages in a thread will get off the original subject — this is one of the biggest jobs we've got. Conversations tend to wander, people say "By the way . . ." and the whole message goes off on a tangent. But it still has the original subject heading, so a user scanning through the subjects won't know what's really in the message. A sysop or assistant sysop can break that thread at that point, give it a new subject that is more relevant to the real content, and stick it back on the board.

We're sort of laboring in the electronic field here, weeding and hoeing wherever necessary

PAT: *How did you wind up as the Comics Forum's sysop?*

DOUG: I started working with CompuServe six years ago. I'm on the executive staff of the Academy of Model Aeronautics, an organization devoted to people who build and fly model airplanes. The hobby business is where I've spent my whole professional life — I've written eight books on the subject, I've been a magazine editor and writer for a long time. I work here as director of special projects. I poked around with computers quite a bit, discovered CompuServe, and decided there ought to be something for people who fly model airplanes. So, six years ago, I started a forum called ModelNet — which I still run — and it's been very successful. The Comic Forum spun off the Science Fiction Forum, and the fellow who was sysop of the SF Forum — **George Wilhelmson** — was also running the comics group. About three years ago, George decided it was time to retire and CompuServe was looking for somebody to take over the Comics Forum. They came to me as a sysop who was already running quite a successful forum and said, "We know you're into comic books. Would you take this on?" I debated for all of about two nanoseconds before saying, "Hell, yes," and I've been doing it ever since.

Since then, we have spun off the model train folks from ModelNet, so there's now a forum called TrainNet and I now have the overall responsibility for three forums on CompuServe.

PAT: *Let's have a little background on you, Jim.*

JIM PERTIERRA: First of all, I'm just past 40 and I've been working at New York Telephone for 12 years. I'm a budget/mechanization manager in the buildings department, which is one of the few departments that has nothing whatsoever to do with telephones. We strictly handle the buildings . . . whether they're warm enough, cold enough, etc.

I've been reading comics, literally off and on, since 1953. My earliest memories are SUPERMAN, SUPERBOY, and the Dell four-color stuff and WESTERN ROUND-UP, which was my favorite. I read those until 1962, '63 and then dropped them entirely, because it wasn't something a teenager did in those days. I didn't pick them up again until Thanks-

"I saw Simonson, and Claremont, Wolfman and Wein."

giving time, 1985. I was out Christmas shopping with my wife; she went to the ladies' store, I went to the bookstore and happened to see a whole bunch of comics. I'd looked at the same rack for years and never thought anything of it; I just started picking books up off the rack. That about did it. I got rehooked.

It was a totally different era, too. I came from the eight-page stories with no continuations, no Marvel . . .

PAT: *Your wife will probably never go into that women's store again. "That's the one where I was when he discovered this stuff again!"*

JIM: The funny thing, Pat, is that I also bought the biggest book I could find in the store to hide the comics in the bag. It was like a guilty pleasure for a while.

As to how I got hooked up with CompuServe: **Rich Goldberg** is a fellow who infrequently passes through the Comics Forum. At the time I didn't have a modem or anything. I'd been reading comics for two or three years and Rich told me about the forum. He started giving me printed downloads of the message base, going back to late '86 or early '87 . . . the message number was pretty low: 2000 and something. I started reading them and thought this was neat stuff. I saw **Walt Simonson's** name there, and **Chris Claremont** and **Marv Wolfman** and **Len Wein**. Every month he'd send me about 200 pages of downloads to read. Finally, I bought a modem — in fact, the one you've got now — for about $100, and we had to run all around the Capital District to find a compatible cable to plug it in to the Macintosh. I got an intro kit and signed on around June of '87. I haven't been off since.

PAT: *I've got about two years on the forum, too.*

JIM: When Doug came on as sysop, George passed my name on to him as a possible assistant sysop. One of the things I started to do was take the downloads and keep track of who was on. I had a list at the beginning of 1989 of about 150 names — anybody who just happened to log on to the forum. Of those 150, there are about 20 who are on all the time. That list is now somewhere around 500 . . . it's just exploded with the people who have come through in the past six months. Usage has gone up enormously in the last several months.

PAT: *I noticed that the message numbers have escalated exponentially.*

JIM: Funny thing is, it seemed to have nothing to do with the BATMAN stuff. That was all over by September when the forum started to really rip. Between you and me, often there's not a lot about comics on the forum . . .

PAT: *But, occasionally, there are things like the discussion not long ago about DC's imaginary geography. And then there's the fellow who came on last week screaming about how bad all the current comics are. I thought he might have been a shill for Gary Groth from the way he came across.*

Anyway, so Doug asked you to become an assistant sysop . . .

JIM: Doug asked me about February of 1988, just after he took over. And it's all history from that point.

PAT: *Something that may attract people to join the Comic Forum is that it is a damned good place to communicate directly with a fair number of well-known names in the professional side of comics . . .*

DOUG: Exactly. That's been my big goal since I took the project over.

PAT: *Off the top of your head, can you give a list of the names folks might recognize? There's Walt and Louise Simonson . . . .*

DOUG: Two of the most delightful people I've ever met. They talk a lot about what they do.

Chris Claremont, of course, shows incredible patience *(Laughter)* with a lot of the messages there. **Marv Wolfman** comes in from time to time, which is lots of fun because of the fantastic work he's doing with the BATMAN these days. **Peter Laird** of TEENAGE MUTANT NINJA TURTLES has been known to poke his snoot in.

PAT: *John Ostrander and Kim Yale . . .*

DOUG: Yes. I just got a complete collection of MANHUNTER – except for the last one – and it crushes me that this thing is disappearing. At least I've got the whole set.

PAT: *Randy and Jean-Marc Lofficier, who can give us an awful lot of information about European comics . . . MOEBIUS, especially.*

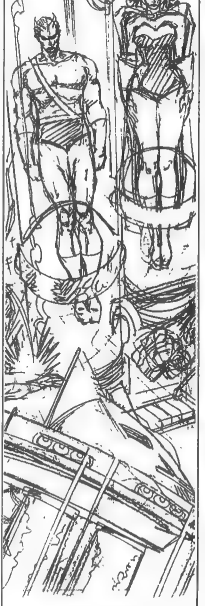
DOUG: Mike Gold, who is deeply involved at DC, of course . . .

PAT: *Mark Evanier or Ev-an-yay — however he pronounces that . . .*

DOUG: And who has got to be the world's greatest threat at Trivial Pursuit. *(Laughter.)* The mind boggles — the man either lives in a room full of dictionaries or he has a head that needs a wheel barrow to carry it. He is always there to answer questions.

There are some other interesting authors like **Mike Straczynski**; and we have **Rick Sternbach** who works in the art department for STAR TREK — THE NEXT GENERATION. **Straczynski** is a big fan of Japanese comics and animation, making that section nice and lively.

One of the things that excites me is that we're getting quite a bit of attention from newspaper comic-strip creators. We have **Bill Amend**, who writes FOX



Pencils by Simonson.

SuperMarionation – "Done by a fellow named Anderson."

TROT, one of the hottest new strips . . . and one of our mainstays is **Christopher Browne**, son of the late **Dik Browne**. Chris now handles HAGAR THE HORRIBLE, and his brother along with **Mort Walker**, does HI AND LOIS. I'm working to expand the involvement of professionals in the newspaper strip area, but Bill and Chris keep things lively over there and we talk quite a bit about newspaper strip happenings.

PAT: *When did you get interested in comics, Doug?*

DOUG: I've been interested in comics pretty much all my life. My earliest memories of things that I wanted to read were the POGO books that my oldest brother was collecting. I think that, in my generation — and I wouldn't be surprised if this were still true because I have a son who is a year-and-a-half old and we look at comics - a lot of people learned to read because they wanted to know what all those little characters are saying. I can think of lots worse ways to learn, too.

When I was in my early teens, I discovered **Will Eisner** and THE SPIRIT. I think I picked up the first of the Harvey reprints. There were only three of them, but I got them all. Then I started snooping around, discovered it was a reprint, found out more about it, found that there were places where you could get such things. That has been a collecting passion.

I've been interested in television animation for a long time. I grew up with the Warner Bros. cartoons, of course, and the others. Specifically, since we lived in upstate New York, we got a lot of Canadian TV which is pretty British. I discovered a series of British-made shows, beginning with one called SUPERCAR, done by a fellow named **Gerry Anderson.**

PAT: *The puppet animation . . .*

DOUG: Marionettes, yes, with electronics in the heads to synchronize the lips and the eyeballs. SUPERCAR was, what, 1960 — I was only eight or nine at the time, but it made a real impression. I really loved the stuff. I followed it all the way up through the late '60's, when they did a four-year production run on a series called THUNDERBIRDS, which was by far their best. In one of those years, I was studying in England, so I got to visit the studio. They made two feature films out of THUNDERBIRDS and I saw the set while they were shooting the second. Fantastic stuff!

PAT: *You and I must be about the same age . . . because I remember many of the same things at the same ages.*

DOUG: I'm 38.

PAT: *Me, too.*

DOUG: We both grew up in the '60s.

PAT: *We got off on a tangent there, didn't we?*

DOUG: I've spent most of my professional life working on things that other people do for fun. That's fine with me. I feel that hobbies and leisure and arts and entertainment are crucially important. We live in a world in a time where people cannot get an identity out of what they do for a living anymore — at least the ones of us who can are very lucky. But some of these people go home and — you don't realize it — maybe they're the world's foremost expert on Warner Bros. cartoons. Or they are building some sort of radio-controlled model in the basement. It's something they can point to that says, "I'm special: I can do this."

It's crucial in this day and age for people to have something like that. It's escapism, to a certain extent, but there's nothing wrong with that, either. One of the things I'm enjoying in terms of overall trends is that comics are being perceived less and less as "greasy kids' stuff." I wasn't all that crazy about the BATMAN movie, but I'm glad it exists. It makes people realize that this stuff is out there and it's no more or less escapist than INDIANA JONES. In fact, INDIANA JONES was a wonderful comic book that just happened to start out as a movie.

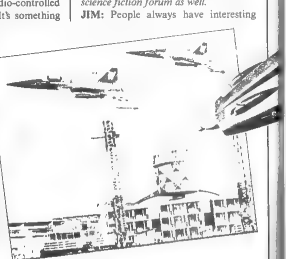
PAT: *Jim, what is it about the forum that keeps you involved?*

JIM: Well, aside from my sysop duties, I feel that — even though I haven't met a lot of these people I know the regulars like my own family. I've met you and Walt and **Cheryl Harris**. Then there's the non-regulars and professionals. The professionals are always very courteous and willing to answer questions, whether in private or in public. We get a lot of news.

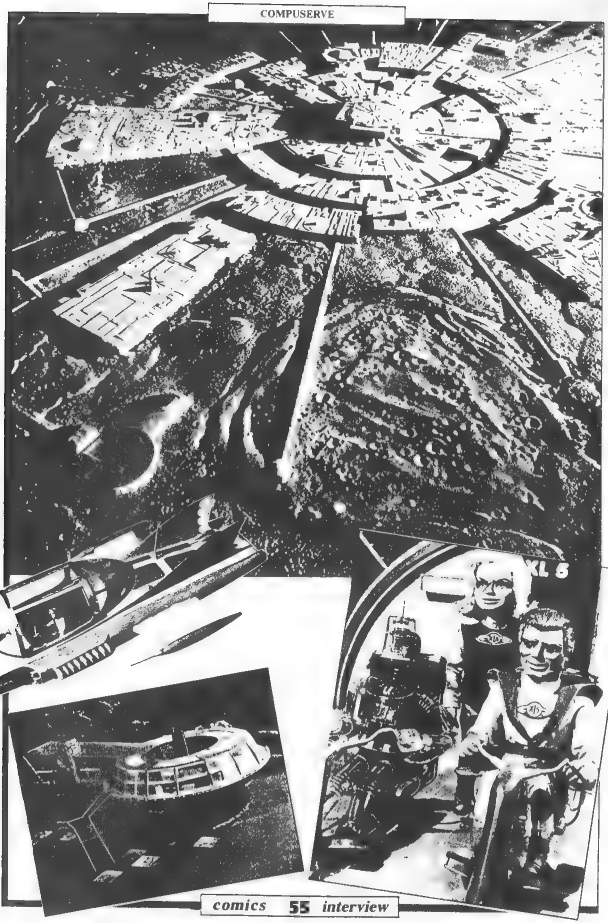
But the real thing that keeps me on there is the feeling of camaraderie with the other people. It's like family gatherings, sometimes: We start off talking about one subject and then you just wander all over the lot.

PAT: *Recently there was a thread under the censorship section that got onto the subject of Santa Claus and what constituted a legit attitude toward telling our kids about Santa Claus. Oddly enough, the same thread got started over on the science fiction forum as well.*

JIM: People always have interesting



Left to right: FIREBALL XL-5, STINGRAY, SUPER CAR, THUNDERBIRDS, more XL-5, and Moon Base Alpha from SPACE: 1999, all from Gerry Anderson & Co.



"Walt Simonson has an original Steve

things to say . . . and whether you agree or disagree with them, they keep you thinking. Some of the people write so well. I could sit and read **Paul Grant's** messages for the rest of my life and be a happy man. It has a lot to do with Doug, here, too. Doug fosters that.

PAT: *We've said the discussions don't always center on comics . . . what kinds of things do get talked about?*

JIM: Obviously, censorship is a major, major topic, ever since **Steve Gerber** brought it up and then we opened a special section for it. We get a lot of interesting discussion over there.

I was reading some old downloads the other day and discovered another recurring topic: What is good art?

PAT: *We do seem to argue taste a lot . . .*

JIM: There is also a lot of discussion from the animation side of the Warner Bros. cartoons. Between **Evanier** and **Dave Mackie** and **Jay Leonard**, you can learn a lot.

PAT: *When I first joined the forum, there was a tremendous amount of discussion of Japanese animation. I haven't looked in over there in quite a while . . .*

JIM: There are a lot of messages there, but I can't always follow them. Steve pretty much watchdogs that section.

The thread that went on the longest was when **Steve Gerber** asked the questions for the WAP! survey. I don't think the article based on the survey ever appeared, but the big question was "Why people don't read independent comics." The interesting thing was that a lot of people got involved in it. One of them was **Cheryl Harris**, who had never read an independent in her life, and she's now reading all kinds of independents, as a result of that discussion.

PAT: *I'm always fascinated when a new user comes on.*

JIM: I can always tell the kids. They come on and leave a load of messages for a week or a month — and then the bill comes in, and they disappear. Remember "Spidey?" He came on and started ripping into **Steve Ditko** . . .

PAT: *And he got a lot of response . . .*

JIM: Including my man man, **Walt Simonson**, who told him very politely that he didn't know what he was talking about. Walt has an original **Ditko** hanging in his house; it's one of his prized possessions. Don't tread on Steve around Walt.

ANYONE CAN BE A HERO WHEN THE ODDS ARE THREE TO ONE. WHEN THE ODDS ARE GOING 2 TOUGH — WHEN THERE SEEMS TO BE NO CHANCE — THAT'S WHEN — IT COUNTS!
EVERYTHING GOING BLACK... MY HEAD ACHING! HOW LONG — I MUST HOLD ON —!
IT'S SMOKING CAN I STOP NOW? LAST CHANCE I MUST KEEP THE WEB ON — SMOKE JUST A LITTLE MORE —!

Above: Steve Ditko's Spider-Man at his finest hour, from THE AMAZING SPIDER-MAN #33, 1966. Below: Unpublished pencil work by Ditko from THE FLY (from the revival half a decade ago by the publishers of the Archie Series).

PAT: *That's right . . . you've become very good friends with Walt and Weezie — and that all started because of CompuServe.*

JIM: I don't care if this gets into print, because I've told Walter. One of the first Marvel series I read when I got back into comics was DAREDEVIL by **Frank Miller** . . . which I found out about by reading **Miller's** interview in COMICS INTERVIEW! Anyway, I went out and bought all the back issues – cheaply because I got in on it early – and one of

Ditko — it's one of his prized possessions."

Doug Pratt (in sweater) at play — with friend and model.

the issues had a picture of Weezie in **Shooter's** cowboy hat. It was captioned as **Louise Jones**, so I didn't know she was married to Walt. My thought was, "She's cute . . . I'd like to meet her sometime . . ."

Then I found out she was married to Walt.

DOUG: So for those who have a computer, a modem, and who aren't already participating in the Comics Forum — buy a CompuServe sign-up kit, which gives you the manual and $25 of free usage credit and gets you going. Or you can call CompuServe's toll-free number, 1-800-848-8990 — and I'm amazed I can remember that — or you can drop me a note and I will send you a free intro pack, along with a little documentation that I've pulled together which will save you the $39.95 or whatever the software store charges for it. My address is: Doug Pratt, 2598 John Milton Drive, Herndon, VA 22071.

PROFESSIONALS WHO FREQUENT THE FORUM:

Bill Amend — Creator, FOX TROT

Chris Browne — Son of cartoonist **Dik Browne**; writer/artist: HAGAR THE HORRIBLE, PLAYBOY

Chris Claremont — Writer: X-MEN, WOLVERINE, EXCALIBUR

Mark Evanier — Writer: THE NEW GODS; Screenwriter for various animated and live-action TV series. Also has something to do with GROO.

Steve Gerber — Writer: THE SENSATIONAL SHE-HULK

Nat Gertler — Primary English scripter: SPEED RACER CLASSICS; writer: "The Visit," GRIMJACK #57

Mike Gold — Editor: DC Comics

Bob Greenberger — Editor: STAR TREK and STAR TREK: THE NEXT GENERATION; contributor: STARLOG

Peter Laird — Co-creator: TEENAGE MUTANT NINJA TURTLES

Andy Helfer — Editor: JUSTICE LEAGUE AMERICA, JUSTICE LEAGUE EUROPE

Randy and Jean-Marc (aka RJM) Lofficier — Translators and editors: MOEBIUS GRAPHIC NOVEL series, FRENCH ICE; featuring Carmen Cru; screenwriters: THE REAL GHOSTBUSTERS, DUCK TALES

Bill Marks — Publisher: Vortex Comics

Jim Massara — Letterer: Marvel, First, Dark Horse, Hero, Comics Interview Group

Dan Mishkin — Co-creator: BLUE DEVIL; AMETHYST, PRINCESS OF GEMWORLD

Patrick Daniel O'Neill — Senior contributing writer: COMICS SCENE; contributor: STARLOG, COMICS INTERVIEW

John Ostrander — Writer: SUICIDE SQUAD, FIRESTORM, WASTELAND (with **Del Close**), MANHUNTER (with **Kim Yale**)

Richard Pini — Co-creator: ELFQUEST

Wade Roberts — Editorial Director: CLASSICS ILLUSTRATED

Hal Schuster — Publisher: Pioneer Comics

Will Shetterly — Author: THE TAANDS, CATS HAVE NO LORD, WITCH BLOOD; co-editor (with **Emma Bull**): LIAVEK shared-world anthologies; writer: CAPTAIN CONFEDERACY

Louise Simonson — Writer: THE NEW MUTANTS, X-FACTOR; co-creator: POWER PACK

Walt Simonson — Writer/artist: FANTASTIC FOUR

Tad Stones — Manager of story development, Disney TV Animation Group; producer (with **Alan Zaslove**): DISNEY'S ADVENTURES OF THE GUMMI BEARS; creator, producer (with **Zaslove**) and executive story editor: CHIP 'N' DALE'S RESCUE RANGERS

J. Michael Straczynski — "Scripts" columnist and contributing editor: WRITER'S DIGEST MAGAZINE; story editor: THE TWILIGHT ZONE TV series (fall '88 first-run syndication), CAPTAIN POWER, THE REAL GHOSTBUSTERS; author: DEMON NIGHT, horror novel from E.P. Dutton, THE COMPLETE BOOK OF SCRIPTWRITING; host, HOUR 25, a weekly two-hour radio talk show on KPFK-FM, Los Angeles, specializing in sf/fantasy/comics pros

Len Strazewski — Writer/editor: TROLLORDS; writer: PHANTOM LADY

Henry Vogel — Writer: SOUTHERN KNIGHTS, ARISTOCRATIC X-TRATERRESTRIAL TIME-TRAVELING THIEVES, MISSING BEINGS

Len Wein — Writer, MR. MIRACLE; editor-in-chief: Disney Publications

David Wise — Screenwriter: TEENAGE MUTANT NINJA TURTLES miniseries, CHIP 'N' DALE'S RESCUE RANGERS and FRIDAY THE 13TH — THE SERIES

Marv Wolfman — Co-creator: NEW TITANS, VIGILANTE, OMEGA MEN, NIGHT FORCE, DIAL 'H' FOR HERO, CRISIS ON INFINITE EARTHS; writer: THE NEW TITANS, JON SABLE

LAST WORD

Comics Interview 234 Fifth Ave. Suite 301 New York, NY 10001

RACK ISSUES ARE TERRIFIC!

Dear David,

The other day, while at my local comic shop (The Comicrypt, in Oaklyn, NJ) I happened to notice that a rack on the floor had several *old* issues of AMAZING HEROES and COMICS INTERVIEW, and one in particular caught my eye: CI *#59*, with a cover featuring OMAHA. Having recently read *all* the OMAHAs, I picked this up after I'd already paid for my week's regular batch of books.

What a terrific issue this was! This was the first time I'd gotten a chance to find out what **Reed Waller & Kate Worley** looked like (*she* reminds me of a couple of girls I met at art school recently) and the interview was fascinating. But it didn't stop there!

Right after this you had an interview with **Gene Colan**! Ever since I picked up the old IRON MAN ANNUAL #1 (all reprints) and turned from the **Don Heck/Wally Wood** lead story to DISASTER and WHEN FALL THE MIGHTY, **Gene Colan** has rarely failed to blow my mind with his stunning visuals. Compared to the other "cartoonists" of the '60s Marvels, he was practically doing oil paintings! For years I've had a black-light/day-glo poster of his from a late-60's DR. STRANGE story where the Masked Sorcerer meets Eternity (they removed most of the word balloons — *boy* does it look cool). He's also one of the few artists from that era that I've had the pleasure to meet at conventions no less than three times over the last 10 years. I'll never forget how tongue-tied I felt the *first* time I met him (on tour with **Steve Gerber** to promote HOWARD THE DUCK — somehow **Gerber** was easier to talk to — perhaps I was less "in awe" . . .) and he strongly recommended I try inking with a brush. Now that I *am* in my spare time I only wish I'd taken his advice a little earlier!

When I saw him in New York last July, I happened to joke that he might be mistaken for working for Archie Comics, since he sat at the same table as **Dan DeCarlo** — at which his wife said, "He does," and held up pages from LIFE WITH ARCHIE. It was incredible — like finding out that **Stan Drake** was drawing BLONDIE — except that, unlike **Drake** (who was *soooo good* at mimicking the strip's style only his signature gave him away) when Gene did ARCHIE pages, although it was plainly in the "Archie style," the layouts were nevertheless unmistakably **Colan**! I still love his work, although in the past 10- years he has consistently gotten better inkers at DC than Marvel (in fact, I really wish he *wouldn't* ink himself as he has on recent "fill-ins" — it looks far too rushed).

So you go and follow this with an article about — I couldn't believe this — TINTIN — which is only my all-time favorite comic series!! (Stan & Jack's FF is #2.) TINTIN has it all — world-reaching adventure, mystery, science-fiction, and *lots* and *lots* of *humor*!! I think a TINTIN animated film *could* be done right. I've recently picked up a couple videos of the old cartoons (which I assume are compilations of serialized stories, spliced together in DOCTOR WHO fashion) and the characters *look* right — but the animation was so stiff, the writing so damned simplistic and the dialogue so repetitive — and the voices, while they may have captured all the characters, were too "cartoony" (I think **Paul Frees** had a lot to do with them). All they really need, I feel, to make a successful adaptation of book to animated film is to *use* the books as storyboards — and do the stories *as written*. Those books, I feel, don't need a single word changed! The problem with the old cartoons was that so little of the character and nuances of the originals survived, in order to "kiddify" them. By the way, it was only about this time last year, after a search of over 20 years, that I was able to complete my collection of the books (those that are available — the earliest couple apparently are felt to be too offensive in ethnic terms somehow — a piece of history sadly missing). At least they were recently put back in print, after a gap of over 15 years (to my knowledge!).

Then you go ahead and finish off the issue by interviewing a *printer*, just when I'm getting myself geared up to try and take a second stab at self-publication (you'd be *amazed* at how much you can learn when you have no idea what you're doing!!). I learned a lot about printing techniques while at art school (I went to the Art Institute of Philadelphia) but unfortunately we never took time to visit one.

If I seem over-enthusiastic, well . . . it just seems that that issue was sitting there *just for me* — and hey! it *was #59* — that's the year I was born! (TWILIGHT ZONE music, anybody?)

Henry R. Kujawa
1202 Everett Street
Camden, NJ 08104

The great thing about COMICS INTERVIEW — as you've discovered, Henry — is that because we are more than just a newszine, the back issues not only remain readable but are packed chock-a-block full of timely and timeless information on all kinds of stuff about comics. Hey, these back issues pages aren't there just to fill space — take a look at what you may have missed and send for those issues of COMICS INTERVIEW You won't be sorry!

As for Gentleman Gene Colan — watch these very pages in upcoming issues for a new! improved! two-part follow-up interview with Gene the Dean.

And thanks for the enthusiastic affirmation, the TINTINabulatin' testament to the value of COMICS INTERVIEW back issues.

— DAK

BETTER THAN COMICS JOURNAL

David —

Wanted to congratulate you on the ongoing interview with **Dan Barry.** This is the most informative interview with a Golden Age comics artist I've read in years — miles better than the **Simon & Kirby** features in a recent COMICS JOURNAL, for instance. **Barry** is such an excellent storyteller, with such an exceptional memory, that he really paints a picture of life as a young comics artist in the "boiler room" days of comics. I can't wait for the third installment, and thanks for this wonderful piece of historical background.

More, more!

Jeff Gelb
1930 Century Park West
Los Angeles, CA 90067

Thanks for the kind words, Jeff — your own talks for us with Bob Kane, Howard Chaykin, Gene Simmons and Frank Miller (in CI #s 70, 75, 81 & 82) have been first rate!

— DAK

BACK ISSUES

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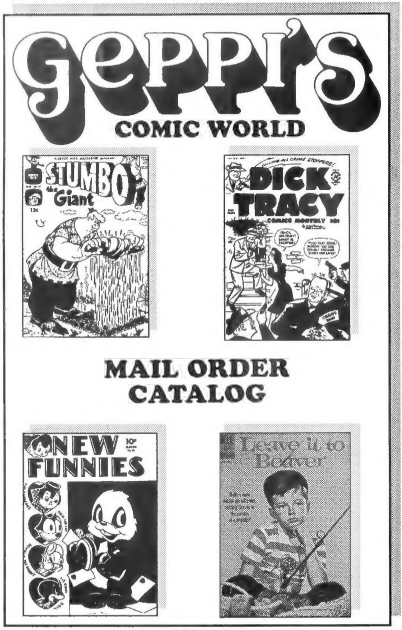

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